CRIME BUSTERS

GREAT DETECTIVE STORIES

A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

10¢

FEB. 1939

TICKETS FOR MURDER

By W. T. BALLARD

MAXWELL GRANT
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No. 1

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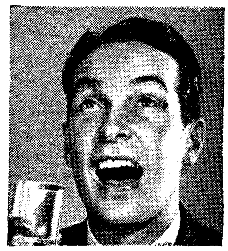

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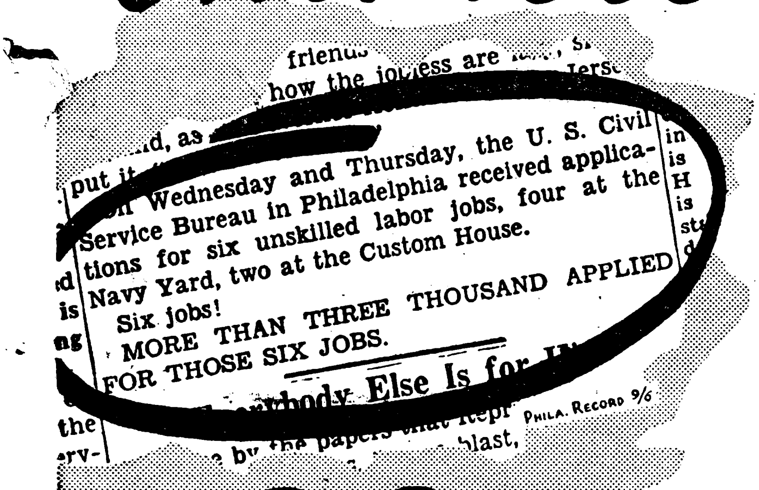

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PHILA. RECORD 9/6

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From The Editor

YOU'LL wonder what the "Six White Horses" have to do with the story by Lester Dent which starts on page 25 of this issue. When you finish the story, you'll understand—so you no doubt will be interested in learning that the idea for the story came to Lester Dent while he was on his European trip last summer. Although Mr. Dent's trip was in the way of a vacation, no good writer ever takes a vacation from his work, for he's always looking for ideas. This, and a few other dandy ones that will be coming along soon, are all the result of that trip.

YES, those are real racetrack tickets you see reproduced on the cover of this issue. They're all losers, too, by the way. When we planned the cover, we thought it would be nice to fill it up with winning tickets, but when we contacted the track about them, we found out that winning tickets are hard to get—both before and after a race—although losing tickets can be picked up by the handful after each event! We got the handful of losers.

WE never like to take too much of this space to tell you about the stories in the current issue, for you'll get to learn all about those just as quickly as you can read through the book. Here are some notes that will whet your appetite for the next issue, for in that you'll find a very fine novelette, "Island of the Guillotine," by Paul Ernst. It's a story about modern criminals in the ancient pirate setting of bayou country, and one swell yarn! There will be another Carrie Cashin story, "The Crazy Crimes," and a new Doc Trouble yarn, by Robert C. Blackmon. Frank Gruber's Jim Strong, racket buster, breaks up a very new and unusual racket in the novelette, "Dogs of Death," and Kenneth Robeson comes back again with another fine story. There are several others that will be bound to make the March issue one of our best thus far—and you'll not want to miss it.

READERS are always interested in hearing what other readers think about a magazine; and you may be sure all editors are eager to know what readers think. We'll give you just a tiny peek into our mail, because, much as we'd like to, we can't do justice to every letter that comes in to us. If you don't agree with some of the comments expressed here, or if you have others of your own to add, just send them to us! We welcome letters, especially when they are really sincere in their suggestions and comments.

Phil Yeaw, 1041 Fifteenth Avenue, So., St. Peterburg, Florida, says about Carrie Cashin, our girl-detective character: ". . . I found that for once here was an author who made the heroine of a story a true heroine instead of a weak butterfly type of girl as in most stories . . . " and adds, further, ". . . another feature I like about the stories in Crime Busters is the ring of humor in a reasonable amount in the stories."

You'll find that Carrie Cashin will continue to be a true heroine in practically every issue of Crime Busters, for she's become the favorite of our readers, and the continued appearance of favorite characters is our strong suit, as James V. Taurasi, 137-07 Thirty-second Avenue, Flushing, N. Y., expresses the opinion of thousands of others who have ". . . always liked magazines that carry over characters like Crime Busters does . . ."

Arthur E. Becknell, 800 Eighth Street, Olympia, Columbia, South Carolina, thinks that the Doc Trouble stories by Robert C. Blackmon are terrific! Becknell will be glad to learn that Blackmon is a "fellow South Carolinan" who makes his home in Florence, South Carolina, and who comes to New York three or four times a year. On his last trip, the editor had the pleasure of taking Mr. Blackmon on his *first subway ride.* There's another Doc Trouble yarn coming next issue!

Morris J. Samuels, 919 E. Armour Street, Kansas City, Missouri, likes very much the Maxwell Grant stories, Carrie Cashin, the Gadget Man, Red Brennan, and practically every character we've printed thus far. The only thing he doesn't like about these stories is that it's too hard to decide which ones to not like; they're all so good.

IT makes us especially happy to have our readers tell us how much they like the various characters which appear in this magazine from time to time. So very often you will read a story that is exactly what you want in the way of entertainment—but you can't help feeling a bit of regret as you finish, for you know that will be the end of the story, the characters, and everything else connected with it.

It is quite a different feeling to know that a good yarn which you read in this issue will give you double joy because, in the next or early succeeding issue, you will see your hero back again, facing an even bigger problem, and handling it with equal dispatch. We like to get them back, too, because we've come to be well attached to our own favorites, the same as you, no doubt, have become attached to yours.

NED O'DOHERTY, whose story, "Murder Hails a Cabby," appears in this issue, is not a taxi driver, although you could readily believe him to be one after you get the "feel" of the story. Actually, O'Doherty is a member of Uncle Sam's customs inspectors, and he has played an important part in some of the biggest seizures in the Port of New York. He has been in the service for a good many years, and many of his tales are based upon actual experiences which he has had, or which fellow workers of his have gone through.

His hobby, however, is to "visit" with the taxi drivers who form the huge lines at the piers, waiting for passengers when the big passenger liners dock. Sometimes, when the huge boats are delayed, the customs men must kill time along with all others concerned, so they have a half hour or so in which to swap tales with these cab drivers.

Lest you readers begin to worry about Uncle Sam's workers wasting their time in this way, don't let it get you. Whenever boats are delayed the customs men, and all others, must stay on until work is finished, which means that they keep working several hours past their regular time, which more than makes up for the few minutes of spare time they may get earlier. Some of O'Doherty's future stories will deal with the customs.

NORMAN A. DANIELS, who has appeared in our pages several times, lives a typical writer's life, it seems

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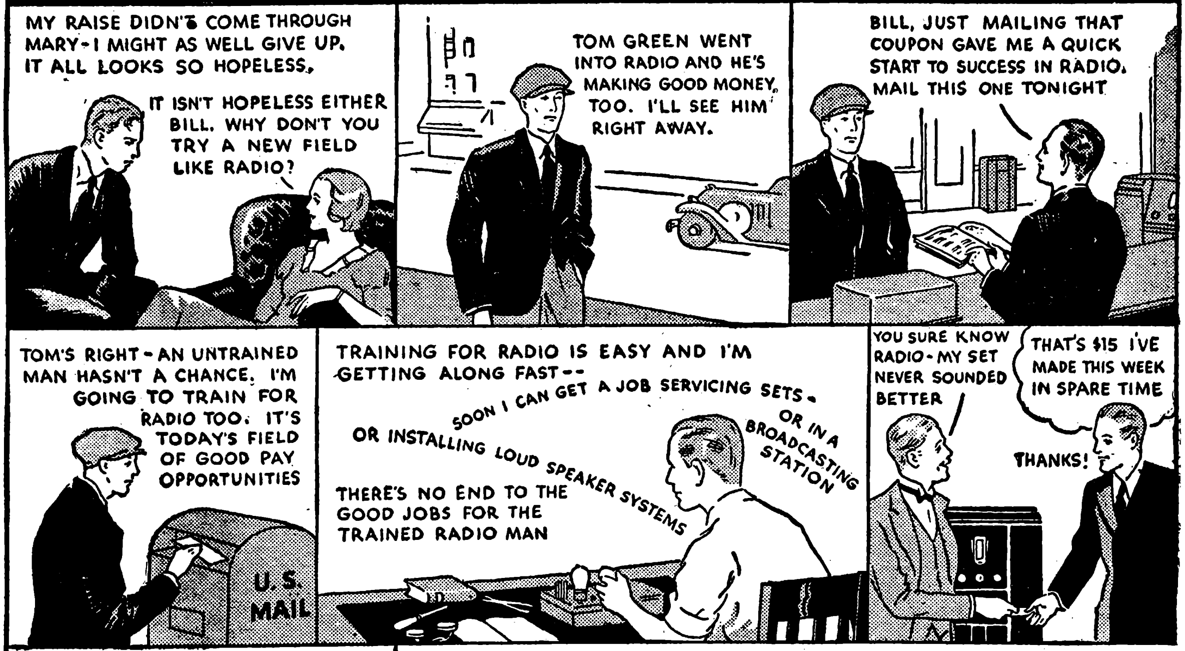
HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED—THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!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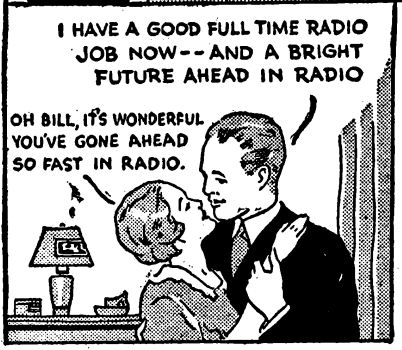
I HAVE A GOOD FULL TIME RADIO JOB NOW—AND A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD IN RADIO
OH BILL, IT'S WONDERFUL YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO.

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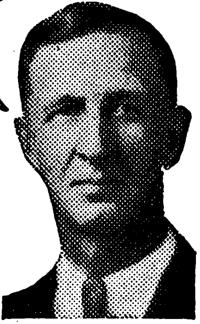

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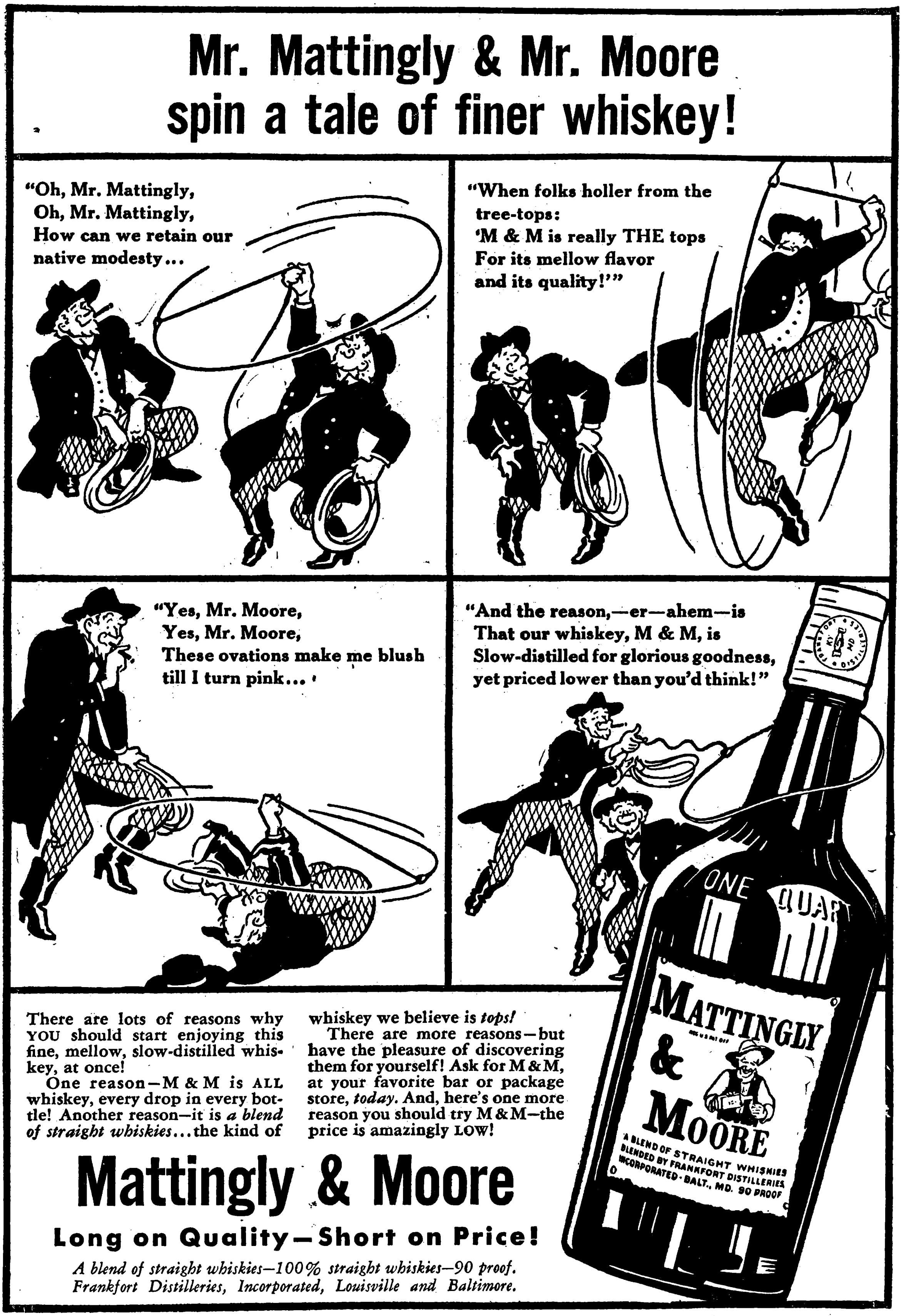
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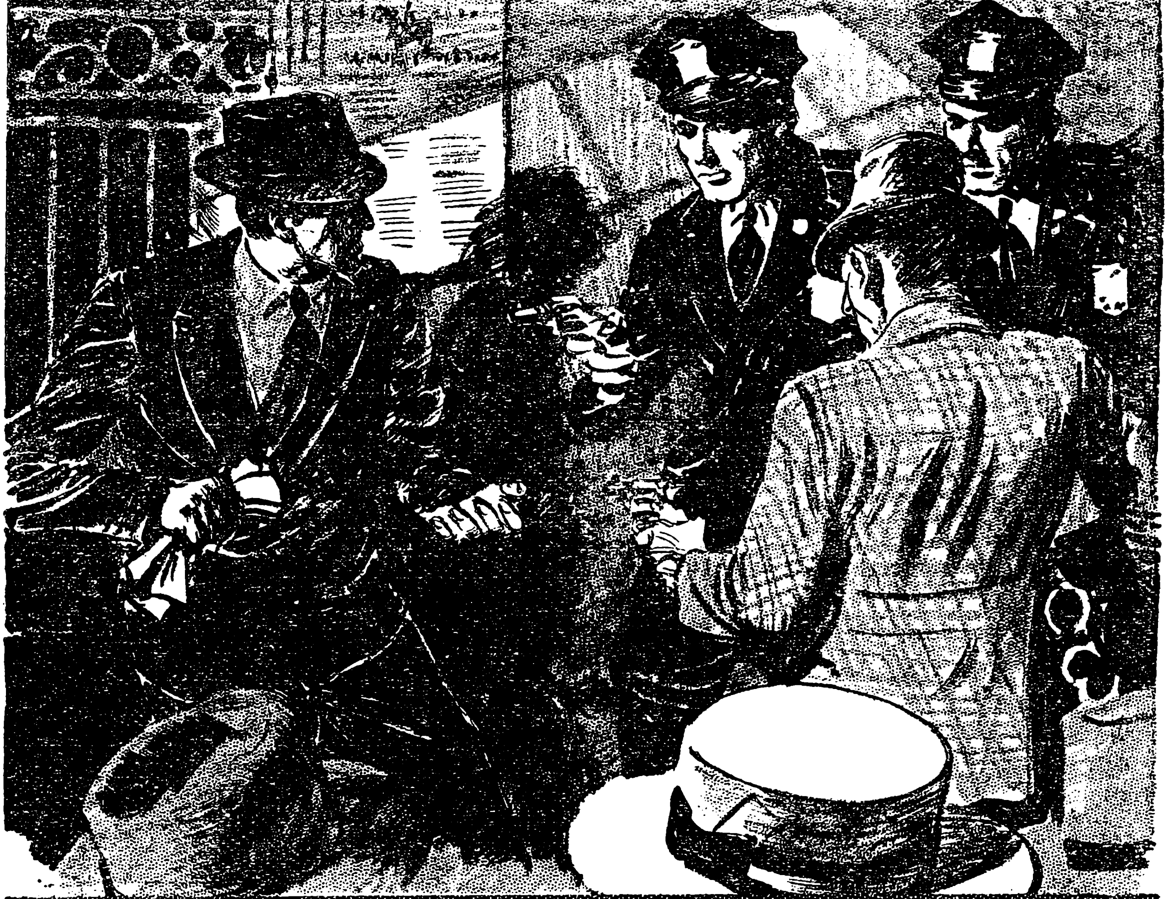
THE GIRL WAS IN THE MONEY, PLACING BETS ON

TICKETS FOR MURDER



BY W. T. BALLARD

—A RED DRAKE STORY—

CHAPTER I.

GIRL IN THE MONEY.

THE girl's hair looked like taffy—nice creamy taffy with a yellowish tinge. She was standing with big Mike Strange before the hundred dollar cashier's window at Holby racetrack, and she had a fistful of win tickets bunched in her little hand.

I was right behind her in line. I looked around the big betting shed, then I looked back at the windows.

There were men behind them, paying off the winners of the last race. Behind the cashiers were other men —supervisors. And I saw one man who wasn't a supervisor. He was big, too. He had on a gray suit—a nice suit. He looked important. He was important. He was head of the pari-mutuel department at the track.

Hartwell Hall had been a banker before he got the job. The racetrack had picked him to head their pari-mutuel department because they'd been having trouble. They were still having trouble, but it was another kind.

A lot of counterfeit tickets were being cashed every day—a lot of tickets that the track had never printed. The "take" on the phony tickets so far ran well over a hundred thousand dollars.

The track owners were crazy. So was Hall. The cops ran around in circles, not finding out anything. The State Racing Commission was doing its best, but still the phony tickets continued to pour in.

Hall was standing behind the cashiers, stepping forward now and then to examine the tickets. There were Pinkerton men around waiting to make an arrest, but Hall gave no signal.

The line I was in moved forward. The girl was within three persons of reaching the window. I joggled her arm and made her drop her purse. It was a nice purse of brown leather, with big brass initials fastened to it. The initials were MB. They might have stood for Mary Brown.

But they didn't. They stood, unless I'd made a bad mistake, for Myra Bowman.

I stooped to pick up the purse. So did Mike Strange. But I was faster than Mike was. I had it in my fingers, was straightening before he got fully bent over.

We came up together, bumping heads. I twisted. For an instant my body hid the purse, then I turned to find that Mike was glaring at me with his flat, gray eyes. Those eyes had sent a lot of chill through a number of punks.

Mike Strange was a big-shot gambler. He'd been around the town for years, and the cops had never got anything on him—but they said he was a bad boy to monkey with. His eyes made the short hairs at the back of my neck get a funny, prickly sensation. That was the kind of eyes they were.

He said, "I'll take that purse."

I told him flatly, "The lady dropped it," and handed it to her.

SHE thanked me with a little smile. Mike didn't like it very well. In fact, he didn't like it at all. The line moved on toward the window.

I said to the girl, "Sailor Boy won like a real racehorse, didn't he?"

She nodded, but she wasn't making conversation. I turned on my smile. That, with my red hair, usually gets them. Then I pulled out a fistful of tickets. They looked big. They should have—there was a thousand dollars' worth in my hand.

I told her casually, "Another couple of days like this and I won't have to work for awhile."

Her brown eyes widened at sight of my tickets. "You must have had the tip, too—"

"Sure," I said, "a very good tip. If I could get another like it, I'd be a millionaire. I'd shoot the whole works right back on the horse."

She'd reached the window and turned to cash her tickets, then she followed Strange through the crowd. I turned my head to watch her. I was much more interested in her than in the money which the payoff man was counting out for me. I

caught up the sheaf of bills and trailed the girl.

She wasn't so hard to follow. The little red jacket she wore stood out like a bolt of lightning on a gray, foggy day. I saw her pause behind a post and hand Strange a wad of money, then Mike turned and faded into the crowd. Myra Bowman went up the wide stairs toward her seat in the grandstand.

I took a chance on her going back to the same seat she'd occupied during the preceding race. I dashed for the next stairway, dived up it and was sitting in her row by the time she got there. I put a lot of surprise into my face when she came up.

"Why, hello there, lucky!"

She hesitated, then she had a nice smile across her lips as she sat down. "Why call me lucky? You won a lot of money, on that last race, didn't you?"

I nodded. "Sure, but not half what you got. I saw you being paid off. Remember?"

A little cloud darkened her eyes. "That money wasn't exactly mine—"

As soon as she said it I knew, by her expression, that she regretted the words.

"Not yours?" I made my smile puzzled. "What were you doing . . . cashing them for a sick sister?"

She didn't want to answer, and yet she didn't want to just shut me up. She sat there, the reddened nails at the ends of her long, slender fingers picking at the edge of her program. "I . . . I work for a big better."

"You what?"

She said, "I'm not supposed to talk about it. I work for a big better. I merely cash part of his tickets for him, that's all."

"Oh, I get it!" But I made it plain by my tone that I didn't. "Why can't he cash his own?" I asked.

The girl shook her head. "I don't know. I'm not supposed to talk. I'm sorry—"

She was getting nervous.

I leaned toward her. "Look, sister. I'm not such a small better myself. How would you like to work for me? I'll give you a cut on every winner."

Again she shook her head. "I'm doing all right. We have the winner in every race."

I looked at her, then grinned. "Why, so do I. I'll play ball and give you a real chance to clean up. I have the winner of each race, and I have as many tickets on it as I think the traffic will bear."

She stared at me. I knew she was frightened. She tried to get up, but I grabbed her wrist. "Wait a minute, sister. Are you a female dick?"

She attempted to jerk free, but my grip on her wrist only tightened. "Hold it. You're not going anywhere until we get this straightened out—"

The man's voice was heavy with threat. "Who do you think you are, punk?"

I LOOKED up to see Johnny Ryan. He didn't know me, but I knew him as one of the worst killers that Chicago ever had. It was a nice pair—Johnny Ryan and Mike Strange. The girl certainly picked swell friends.

I said coldly, still holding on to the girl's wrist, "Supposing you back up and try another street. You're in the wrong alley."

His eyes looked like fresh buttermilk. They were almost white, with little flecks of yellow in the retinas. He said softly, "You're the one that's in the wrong alley, redhead. I don't know who you are, but you look like you're over twenty-one and should know a couple of the answers. The answer to this one is . . . scram!"

I just grinned at him. My right hand was holding the girl's wrist; my left was up in front of me. As calmly as if I'd been lighting a cigarette, I unbuttoned the single button of my gray coat and let it fall open so that he could see the harness strapped across my blue shirt, and the gun under my right armpit. I can use either hand. That I used my left fooled a lot of the boys.

When he saw the gun his eyes changed. They got very narrow. "Just what are you trying to pull?" he snarled.

I told him, "The question might go both ways. You don't look like a Pinkerton to me. If you are, I'm making a mistake. If you aren't, I'm warning you to keep that big snozzle out of my business. I'm liable to take a couple of chips off it."

The girl wasn't saying a thing. She was just sitting there, white-faced. We were talking very low. The crowd around us had been watching, not understanding what was going on, but they turned away as someone yelled, "They're off!"

Ryan stood there shifting his weight uncertainly from one foot to the other. The last thing he wanted was trouble. A lot of Pinkertons and city cops were in the crowd, and if he started anything we'd have the law on our necks in quick order.

Finally, he said, "What's your graft, brother?" He'd decided that I wasn't a policeman and had relaxed slightly.

I told him, "My graft's my own, punk, and I don't want any two-bit hot-shot cutting in on it."

He got mad at that. He had a lot of pride—this killer who had terrified Michigan City and South Chicago; but he controlled himself with an effort, turned on his flat heel and went down the concrete stairs.

The girl let her breath out slowly. I looked at her. "You know such interesting people, toots."

She shuddered. "I'm afraid of him."

I said, "Anyone in their right senses should be afraid of him. He acts like a bad boy out of a storybook. Who is he?"

"He's the bodyguard of the man I work for. All big-shot gamblers have bodyguards . . . they have to. They carry a lot of money, you know."

I was studying her closely. She had her story learned very well. She knew all the answers—at least they sounded as if she knew them all. But the story was as full of holes as a fish net.

She rose, pulling her wrist free from my fingers. "I must go. . . . I'm busy."

I didn't try to stop her. I wasn't ready to show my hand yet. I wanted to get her brother, but first I wanted to see what Frank Howe had found out. I cut through the crowd, went down the stairs beside the clubhouse, through the betting shed and under the stand.

There was a room on the right where the maintenance crew kept their brooms and buckets. The door was standing open a couple of inches. I pushed it and went in, walked around the row of lockers and stopped.

FRANK HOWE lay on his back against the far wall. His coat was open and there was a knife sticking out of the cloth which had once been white. It wasn't white now. There was a big patch of dull black-red. The blood was oxidizing in the air. He'd been dead maybe ten minutes—dead while I was upstairs arguing with Ryan and the girl. I stood there staring down at him.

In my racket you expect danger—you even expect death. We run into it a lot of the time. But I hadn't expected death here, and it hit me. I liked Frank Howe.

I'd told him to trail Strange while I trailed the girl, and to meet me down here after the race. He'd come down all right, but someone had followed him—

I looked hastily around the place, but there was nothing. Then I bent over and checked his pulse, heart action, even though I felt certain I wouldn't find any.

I didn't want to be there when someone came stumbling in, so I left the room. I didn't care to answer all the questions that the cops and Pinkertons would think up to ask.

I walked down the betting shed, knowing I'd find the girl before one of the payoff windows. She was there, all right—before the ten-dollar window. And Johnny Ryan was nearby, leaning against an iron post, a cigarette hanging from one corner of his tight mouth. He saw me almost as soon as I saw him.

He moved toward me; both hands were deep in his side pockets. "We want to talk to you."

It was a command.

My voice wasn't excited. I nodded. "I thought maybe you would—"

His eyes flickered at that. The girl chose this minute to turn away from the window. She was pretty surprised to see me. Her face got a funny, pasty look, as if all the blood had suddenly flowed from her small body.

Ryan jerked his head. "Up this way, punk. You know where to take him, Myra. We're going to talk to Strange."

For an instant, the girl hesitated; then, without a word she turned and led the way.

CHAPTER II.

MAN WANTED.

MIKE STRANGE was standing against the fence, up toward the distant barns. There wasn't anyone close to him. His eyes were narrow slits as they looked me over. "You again?" He'd recognized me as the punk who had picked up Myra's bag.

"So what?" I said.

The smile on his lips was very thin. "So we want to know what you're trying to pull. What do you want, anyway?"

I told him, "I want a cut in the game. There's no use of two of us running the same racket at the same racetrack. If we keep on we're bound to get jammed up, and the whole crowd of us'll wind up behind the eight ball."

He wasn't smiling now. "Maybe I'd know what you're talking about if you'd explain."

I laughed at him, softly. "You know what I'm talking about, all right. Listen, Strange. You weren't born yesterday, and neither was I. Al Koble out in Frisco told me you were a smart punk—that he'd taught you this racket and that you were working it here. He suggested maybe I could throw in with you."

Strange's eyes were pin points. "So! You know Koble?"

I nodded slowly. "Sure, I know Koble. Who do you think taught me to print fake pari-mutuel tickets? He's the boy who originated the racket." I turned to look at the girl, but she wasn't there.

Ryan had her by the arm and was leading her on down toward the barns, where they stood watching a group of stableboys. Strange saw the look.

"Who are you, kid?" The voice had lost some of its harshness. "Maybe we could use you, at that—"

"The name's Dunn," I told him. "You can telegraph Koble if you want to and check up."

He said, "Then why didn't you come to me first . . . instead of going on the make for the girl?"

I laughed at him. "A lot of reasons, Strange. If I'd come to you with my hat in my hand, maybe you'd have put me to work for fifty fish a week . . . seventy-five, or even a hundred. I wasn't interested in chicken feed. I set up my own presses. I printed my own tickets and I'm working my own racket. If I go in with you, I go in as a partner . . . not as a hired hand."

He stared at me, hard. "Why the hell'd you pick this racetrack? Why couldn't you pick one of the other ones?"

I told him. "Because this State is one of the few that use pari-mutuel tickets. Most of the others have totalizers. You can't fake a totalizer ticket nearly as well as you can a pari-mutuel. All you have to do at a pari-mutuel track is to find out what ticket and signature they're going to use each day, then print yourself up a wad of them the night before on all the horses in every race. No matter which horse wins, all you have to do is walk up to the payoff window and cash in."

He moved up closer to me. "I think you're stalling. You say you're from out of town. Where the hell'd you get the connections? Maybe you haven't even got a printing press—"

FOR answer, I drew an envelope from my inside pocket, ripped it open and spilled out little packages of tickets. There were ten of them, each done up with a rubber band, with twenty tickets to a package and each package was for a different horse.

I said easily, "Who won the last race? I was busy."

He told me. "Rockwood . . . No. 5. He paid fifteen-eighty for two."

I selected one package, returned the rest to my pocket. "Each of those packages contains twenty ten-dollar tickets. Two hundred dollars on Rockwood, and fifteen-eighty—That will be fifteen hundred and eighty dollars. Now do you believe me?"

He took the tickets and examined them. There was a hint of admiration in his voice. "The track couldn't have done a better job of printing these themselves."

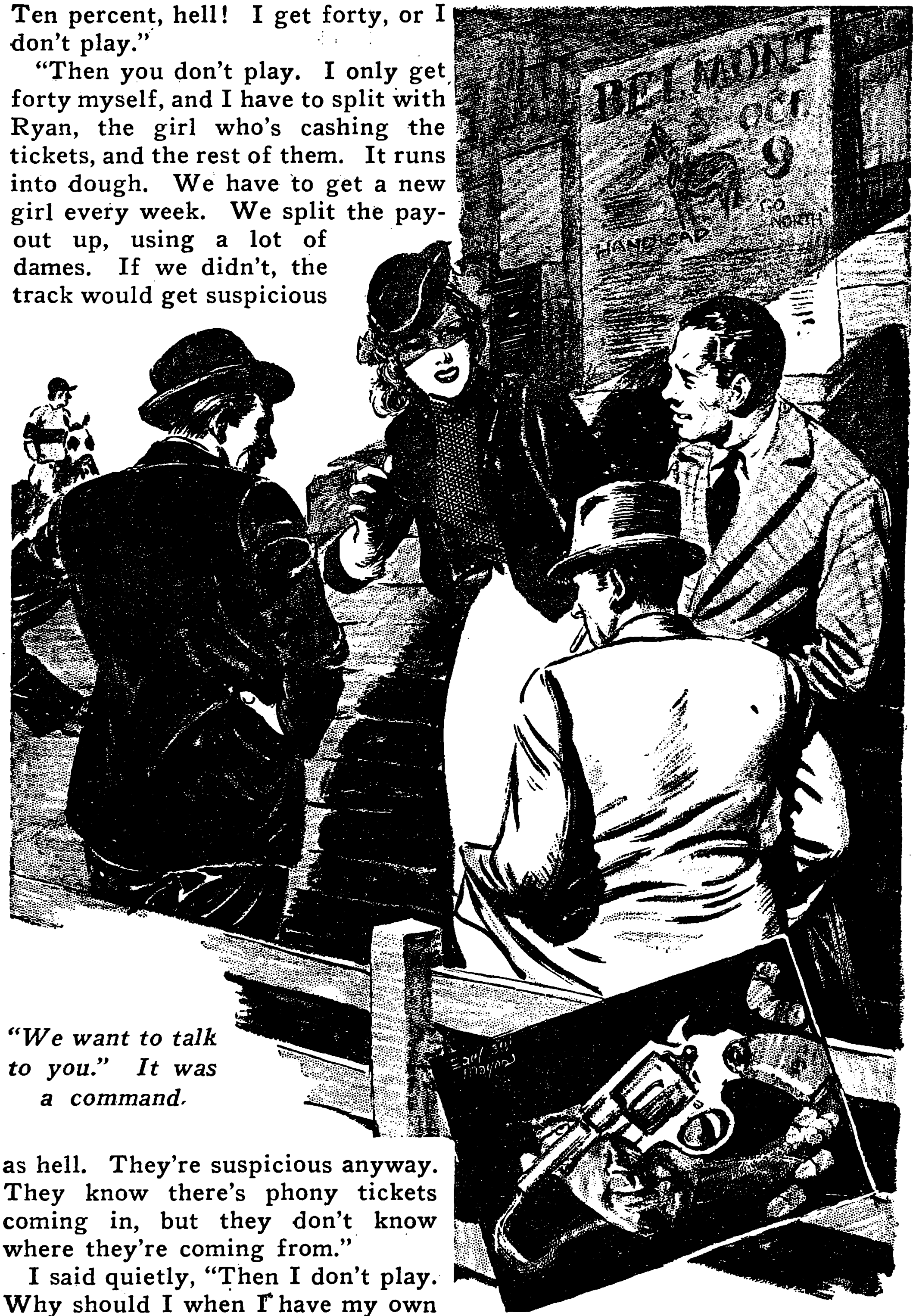
I grinned at him modestly. "I told you I learned my graft under Koble. Am I in or not?"

"You're in." He said it reluctantly. "We can't have you running around loose and spoiling things. You're in for ten percent—"

I laughed at him. "Are you nuts!

Ten percent, hell! I get forty, or I don't play."

"Then you don't play. I only get forty myself, and I have to split with Ryan, the girl who's cashing the tickets, and the rest of them. It runs into dough. We have to get a new girl every week. We split the pay-out up, using a lot of dames. If we didn't, the track would get suspicious as hell. They're suspicious anyway. They know there's phony tickets coming in, but they don't know where they're coming from."



"We want to talk to you." It was a command.

I said quietly, "Then I don't play. Why should I when I have my own graft working my own way? I'm doing all right." I started to turn away, but Strange stuck out a big hand and grabbed me by the sleeve, jerked me around.

"Not so fast, punk. You don't do

it your own way. Either you take ten percent and play with us, or . . . you don't play at all. Got me?"

I said, "Yeah, but I don't hear you. If you change your mind, I'm at the Stratview Hotel . . . Room 410."

I walked off through the crowd, conscious that Strange was watching me with his little eyes.

I went on into the betting shed, walked up to the cashier's window and laid down my tickets. The man was just counting fifteen hundred bucks out to me when I glanced over my shoulder. A couple of Pinkertons were closing in from one way, three city cops in uniform from the other. It was the tip-off, and I knew it.

Strange had had me turned in. If I wouldn't play his game, he wasn't going to let me play anybody's. I shot a quick look around the crowd. About twenty feet away, long lines before the sellers' windows were already forming. I turned back toward the cashier, picked up my fifteen hundred, then I started casually away from the window, counting the money as if I didn't see the Pinkertons coming toward me.

I waited until they had almost reached me. I knew how they made arrests at racetracks. They make them as quietly as possible. Half the time, nobody in the crowd knows there is anything going on. I moved on, still leisurely counting my money.

One of the Pinkertons reached out to lay a hand on my shoulder. "Just a minute, bud—" That was the second I'd been waiting for.

I SQUIRTED between them, like icing from a pastry decorator, shot into the crowd, not heeding their yells behind me. I wormed my way on through the crowd, knowing the cops wouldn't use their guns. There was too much chance of hitting the old innocent bystander. But I was in a hot spot—there was no doubt of that. I ducked around the foot of the stairway, came out on the lawn, worked my way down toward the stretch that leads back to the paddock, and went over the fence.

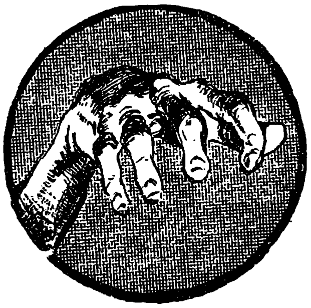
The guard yelled at me, but I paid no attention. The tamarack was soft under my feet as I raced across the paddock, rounded the corner of the receiving barn and ran toward the outer fence.

The track ambulance was parked against the barn wall. The driver was reading a newspaper, propping it against the wheel. I jammed my gun into his ribs as I swung into the seat beside him.

"Get 'er moving, buddy."

I don't think he understood the words, but he did the gun. He didn't know who I was, but he thought fast. I twisted the ignition switch and kicked on the starter. The powerful motor hummed. The driver was releasing his brake, getting it into gear.

We shot out through a gate in the



wire fence. The guard at the gate didn't know but what there might have been an accident. He held traffic for us until we made the turn onto the highway, our rubber squealing as we did so. Then the ambulance shot toward town.

The driver said, "What's this all about?"

I told him, "The less you know, the more chance you have of living. Pull into the first side road you see and stop."

His face got white at that. I guess he thought I was going to gun him down.

I didn't. I got the tape from an emergency kit in the back of the ambulance and bound his wrists and ankles. Then I plastered a patch over his full mouth and put him on the cot in the back end.

That done, I swung under the wheel and headed toward the city, staying off the main drag. I figured there might be an alarm out from the track, although I was pretty sure no one out there had seen me swing aboard.

At Eighth and Central, I pulled up at the curb before a small hospital. I figured that they might not be so apt to ask questions about an ambulance parked in that neighborhood. I went into the corner drugstore, through it and out onto the other street. Then I went on up to my hotel.

BUT I didn't use the room I'd told Strange about. I got one down the hall. A quart bottle of hair dye gave me a black top piece. I figured they'd be looking for a bird with red hair, and that was about all the disguise I needed.

I hung around the room until dinner time. Two different sets of cops showed up, then went away after awhile. The evening papers gave the story half a stick on page one.

RED DUNN ESCAPES RACE-TRACK POLICE
SAN FRANCISCO KILLER STILL AT LARGE

I found from the story that I was badly wanted in San Francisco. It seemed that I'd killed a guy there—a gambler named Patterson. I read the story with interest. The newshawk had done a good job. He'd built it up well. There was a statement from Hartwell Hall, from the president of the racetrack and from Judge Austin, the head of the Racing Commission.

Hall told the reporter that the track had been swindled out of better than a hundred and fifty thousand dollars by the use of counterfeit pari-mutuel tickets. He said that Dunn was obviously the head of the gang which had been flooding the mutuels with the fake tickets.

The president of the track added his word to Hall's. He called on the police to arrest Dunn, to stop this flood of bogus tickets.

Judge Austin talked freely with the reporters. He'd told them that the Racing Commission had been working for almost two weeks on the case; that they had a man assigned to it—a man named Howe. That man had been murdered at the track that afternoon. He said that the murderer must be apprehended at all cost. There was a general alarm out.

I went up to my new room and turned on the radio. The police news came in. The whole department seemed to be hunting for Red Dunn. After I'd listened a few moments, I shut it off, pulled a chair forward, opened the door a crack and sat down so that I could watch the hall. I sat there for almost three hours before the elevator opened and a girl came walking toward me.

She'd changed her clothes, but it wasn't hard to recognize Myra Bowman. I didn't want her knocking on the door of my old room. There were cops staked out at the far end of the passage, and I didn't want to arouse their curiosity. I stepped out into the hall and went toward her swiftly.

"Myra, darling! You're late."

She hadn't looked at me until I spoke. Even after she looked, it was a minute before she recognized me. She was expecting a man with red hair and my hair wasn't red any more. It was black.

She said, "Why . . . I . . . Oh!"

I told her, from the corner of my mouth, "Quiet, baby. The law's watching us. Come on! Let's go downstairs and talk about things." Then in a louder voice, I said, "I got tired of waiting for you, kid. I thought you weren't coming. We'll have to hurry or we'll be late for the party."

I'll give her credit. She caught on fast.

WE went back to the elevator, rode it down and, in one corner of the grill, we faced each other across the table.

She said, without preamble, "I found your note."

I told her, "That's why I slipped it into your purse. I expected you sooner."

"I couldn't get here sooner. They've been watching me. I almost didn't show up at all."

I made my voice hard. "It's a lucky thing you did, baby. If you hadn't, that brother of yours would have wound up doing five years."

Her face got very white. "You wouldn't turn him in, would you? He's only a kid, Mr. . . . Mr. Dunn." She hesitated over the name. "He hasn't done anything so terribly wrong—"

I grunted, "It depends on what you class as wrong, sister. Maybe it's not wrong for him to play in with a gang of sure-shot gamblers. Maybe it's not wrong for him to furnish the paper and tell them what the pari-mutuel tickets look like the day before, so that they can print up their batch . . . so that they can milk the racetrack for a hundred and fifty thousand bucks. It all depends on how you look at it."

She looked at me wide-eyed. "But he's not a . . . murderer."

I knew what she was referring to. She thought I was Red Dunn—the San Francisco killer. She couldn't see that her brother's crime was nearly as bad as mine. She couldn't see why I should kill a couple of guys and then get all worked up because her brother had stolen a hundred and fifty thousand from a racetrack. You couldn't blame her much. It didn't seem to make sense. I had to make it sound plausible.

"Look, baby"—my voice was hard again—"I'm not worrying because the track lost their dough. I'm trying to figure a way to get myself out of a jam. Mike Strange has had the heat turned on me. He squealed to the cops about me and I'm in a spot. I'm in a spot where, if a lawman happens to come along, I'll bounce right off this chair onto the hot seat.

"I'm fighting back the only way I know how. I'm fighting with the information I have. I'll trade with you. If you tell me what I want to know, I won't call up the cops and tell them the funny little tricks your kid brother's been pulling on the pari-mutuel department."

Her voice wasn't much more than

a whisper. "And what is it you want to know?"

I PUT my elbows on the table and leaned closer. "I want to know who the big shot behind Strange is . . . the guy who gets the sixty-percent cut out of the whole take. Tell me that and I'll make my own deal."

"I don't know." She said it steadily and, despite myself, I had to believe her.

I asked, "Does your brother know?"

She hesitated. "I . . . I don't think he does. Honest, Red, I don't think he knows."

I said, "There's one sure way to find out. Let's go over and talk to him."

She got frightened at that. "I can't—"

"You can't? Why not?"

She seemed at a loss for words. "I . . . my brother doesn't know I'm connected with Strange at all. He doesn't know I've been cashing the counterfeit tickets for them."

I stared at her, trying hard to believe. "I don't get it. How come he doesn't know? How'd you get mixed up with Mike Strange, anyway?"

She didn't answer. Instead, she said, "Please don't make me go over there. Please don't. Honest, Red Dunn, I'm playing square with you. I'll do anything you want if you won't expose Jerry . . . but don't spoil things by making me go to my brother."

She was a nice kid, but I couldn't let that influence me. I said harshly,

"There's no other way to play it, sister. I could go over there alone and I might be able to make Jerry talk, but what about you? The minute I walk out of here you'll yell 'copper,' and then where'll I be?"

She sounded desperate. "But I won't! I promise you I won't. Anyhow, how could I? I wouldn't dare. You'd tell the police about Jerry—"

I hadn't thought of that angle for the moment. I nodded. "O. K., then. We'll play it that way. I'll get in touch with your brother . . . find out where he is. Give me your address and his."

She stalled for a moment, then gave me both of them, said, "You won't get too tough with the kid, will you, Red?"

"I won't hurt him, if that's what you mean," I assured her. "All I want to do is make him talk."

My word seemed to satisfy her. We rose and went out onto the street.

There was a cop's car parked across from the hotel entrance; a big plain-clothes man was talking to the doorman. He glanced at me, saw the black hair and looked away. I put the girl into one cab, took another and gave the driver Jerry Bowman's address.

CHAPTER III.

BAIT.

THE ride took twenty minutes, and I spent the whole twenty trying to decide just how I was going to make young Bowman talk. I couldn't figure it out. I'd promised the girl not to be too rough, and I wondered just what too rough meant.

I paid off the driver before the small brick apartment building on the south side of town. Then I went in, found there was no elevator and climbed the carpeted stairs to the second floor.

No one answered my knock. I stood in the hall thinking about it, wondering what time Bowman would be in. I didn't want to go back to the hotel, and I didn't know any place else to go. Finally I pulled a bunch of skeleton keys from my pocket and tried them on the door. The fourth one worked.

I stepped through into an unlighted hall, groped along it to a small, square front room. Light from the street lamp across the street came dimly through a wide window and I stopped, caught my breath. Then I fumbled for the wall switch, found it and clicked it up.

I'd wasted twenty minutes wondering how to make Jerry Bowman talk. No one was ever going to make the boy talk again.

He was dead.

Someone had held a heavy gun close to his side and pulled the trigger, twice. I knew there'd been two shots. Only one hole showed in front, but there were two in back where the slugs had come out.

The powder marks might have made it look like suicide; but if it was, the gun had walked out by itself, for there was no sign of it in the room.

I felt his wrist. The hand was pretty stiff. There was no warmth. I judged he'd been dead a couple of hours. I turned to look around, then stopped as there was sound from outside—footfalls, deadened by the thick carpet.

It might have been some of the other tenants coming in, but some sixth sense warned me that it wasn't. I stole forward to the door which I'd left partly open, peered into the hall.

A COP'S head showed just above the level of the stairway; then another appeared. I shut the door in a hurry, shot the bolt into place. I didn't get it there any too soon. Another minute and they were hammering on the door.

I looked around for another exit. There didn't seem to be one. The pounding on the door was increasing. A heavy voice demanded entrance, then someone called:

"Come on, Dunn! We know you're in there. You haven't a chance. Come on out."

I caught my breath sharply. Dunn! They knew I was there. Someone had tipped them off. The only person who knew where I was headed was the girl, and she'd promised not to tell the cops for fear that I might expose her brother.

I stared at the still figure on the floor. There was no danger of my exposing Jerry Bowman now. You can't expose a dead man. Had she known that her brother was dead before she sent me over to the apartment? Had she sent me there purposely to trap me? Those were a couple of questions I couldn't answer. There were several others, but they weren't important at the moment.

What mattered now was that I had to get out of there fast. I turned and dived into the bedroom. Another minute, and the door would be coming down. Those cops had a lot of shoulders and they were using them for all they were worth. One of the windows was open.

I stuck my head out. It was too far to drop to the ground, but the edge of the roof was just above me. The building had only two stories. I pulled my head in, shoved both the lower and upper sashes down, stepped out over them.

By standing on the sash, I could reach the edge of the roof. I kicked free, pulled myself up. For a minute, I thought I wouldn't make it. My fingers were slipping. It took the last ounce of strength I had to drag myself over the edge.

I lay there for an instant panting, trying to regain my breath; then I looked down just in time to see a cop's head appear. I don't think he saw me. I didn't wait to find out. I went hurrying across the roof.

There was a fire escape at the back of the building. I went down it fast, raced across the vacant lot. I could hear the cops shouting behind me.

I burst through some bushes onto the street. A car swung in toward the curb, its lights cutting across and outlining me for an instant in the darkness. I thought I was a goner—then the car jerked to a stop and the door swung open.

Myra Bowman shouted to me to get in.

I THREW myself onto the seat of the car, slammed the door as she jerked the car into motion. We went down the street, doing thirty-eight in second. At the intersection, another car tried to turn in, cutting us off. I give the girl credit. She had all the guts in the world.

She threw the wheel over hard. The front wheel hit the curb, went over it and we scuttled down the sidewalk like a frightened rabbit pursued by yelping hounds. The other car was turned the wrong way to follow, but it wasn't turned the wrong way to shoot.

RED DRAKE

Crimson flashes lanced out into the darkness, cutting toward us in the night. I had my gun out and was emptying it at the car. As we flashed past I had a glimpse of a white face—Strange.

I couldn't be mistaken. I drove a bullet directly toward it. I saw Mike Strange disappear. I knew that I'd hit him. I sent my next shot at the driver. That was a hit, too. Then the girl had swung us back into the street and we were tearing down the block.

I shoved my gun into the shoulder

clip, told her to take the next street to the right. We had to get out of the neighborhood fast. Then I asked:

"Where'd you come from, baby?"

She said, "I went on home. Then I got worried, so I got the car and came out to see if everything was all right. I was just driving up when I heard a yell and saw you run through the bushes. What happened?"

I hesitated for a moment. I hated like hell to tell her about her brother. It was one of the worst jobs I'd ever had. But she had to know sometime, and it wasn't fair to her to lie. I told her in as few words as possible.

Her face looked white in the reflected light from the dash. I think she must have half suspected. Anyway, she took it without a sound.

I said, "Tough luck, baby." The words sounded inane, but my tone didn't. I put in all the admiration I felt for her.

She seemed to sense it. She said, "Thank you. I guess it couldn't have ended any other way. Jerry was in too deep. I suppose I'll never get them now—"

I said, "Get who?"

She said, "The man behind the racket . . . the man who found out that Jerry was short in his account, the man who forced him to play with the gang."

I STARED at her. "Who is it?"

She said, "I don't know. I'm not sure that my brother knew."

I told her, "He must have known. If he hadn't, they wouldn't have killed him. How'd you happen to be in with Mike Strange? And Johnny Ryan?"

Her voice was steady. "I've suspected for weeks that something was wrong with Jerry. I followed him a couple of nights, saw him meet Strange and Ryan in a little beer hall. I let them pick me up, pretended I was from out of town, looking for a chance to make easy money. After awhile, they told me Strange was a big better out at the racetrack; that he had inside information, but that he didn't want to be seen cashing so many tickets. They offered me a percentage of the take if I'd cash the tickets for them. I didn't know what it was all about at first.

"It was only after I heard talk about counterfeit tickets that I got wise, then I put two and two together. My brother, with his job at the racetrack, was in a position to give them information about each day's pari-mutuel tickets. I kept on, thinking I'd find out who the big shot was. I didn't know what I'd do when I found out. I had a vague idea that I'd go to this man and tell him to leave my brother alone or I'd expose him—"

She broke off, twisting her head to look at me.

I saw the look. She was puzzled. She couldn't understand what all this meant to Red Dunn—Frisco killer. I didn't bother to explain. I said, "Look, baby. Do you want to get your brother's murderer?"

"Do I—"

I said, "O. K., then. Listen! Drive me downtown first. I want to go to the emergency hospital. After that, I'll tell you where to take me."

I got to the hospital before Strange died. I was gambling my shot hadn't killed him. I was right. I walked into his room, despite the nurse's protests, and shoved her out the door.

HE had a hole in his shoulder. He wasn't so badly hurt, but his face was plenty white when he saw me. I guess he thought I'd come to finish the job.

I said, "Look, Strange. I could kill you, see? But it wouldn't buy me a thing. I'm a business man. I'm giving your chief twenty minutes to call me at this number."

I scribbled it on an envelope. "If he doesn't call, I'm going to take Myra Bowman out to see Hartwell Hall, the head of the pari-mutuel department at the racetrack, and let her tell him what she knows."

Strange sneered. "That dame doesn't know anything."

I said, "That's what you think. She talked to her brother on the phone tonight." I took a long shot. I said, "Her brother saw Frank Howe killed this afternoon." I was guessing, but it was a good guess, judging by Strange's face; and it was the only reason I could think of why the gang should kill Jerry Bowman.

The man on the bed sucked his breath sharply. "What do you want?"

I said, "Forty-percent cut on the business. Tell your principal to call me in twenty minutes. You can get hold of him by phone. Otherwise . . . the girl will talk to Hall."

I turned and left.

We waited in a little cigar store, beside the phone whose number I'd given Strange. It didn't ring.

Then we went out and turned our car toward Hall's house. I suspected there might be danger outside. I had my gun ready, but nothing happened.

Hall opened the door himself. He was a big man, good-looking. He looked at us inquiringly.

I told him, "Miss Bowman has some information about the counterfeit tickets at the racetrack. I thought you might like to know—"

He nodded. "Come in."

We went in to a library.

The girl told all about Strange and Ryan, about cashing tickets for them.

I said, "Now, Mr. Hall, we've got some other information," and looked at him squarely. "Either we'll do

Next month we have an especially choice selection of stories which you will not want to miss. Among them:

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business here, or . . . go to the police."

His voice changed. He said, "What kind of business?"

I said, "A hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth," and took my gun out.

I'll admit I was careless, but even careless as I was, I saw Ryan step through the portières, behind me.

The Chicago gunman jabbed his automatic against my back. "All right, Dunn. Drop it!"

I dropped it. Hall laughed, shortly. "You're not as smart as I thought you were, Red. You walked right into the trap."

I stared from one to the other. My eyes looked scared. I ran my tongue around my lips. "Look. Can't we make a deal? Strange is laid up in the hospital. I know the racket. I'll work for twenty per cent . . . even ten."

THEIR faces were hard, unyielding. Hall said, "Yellow!" and slapped me. "Take him down to the cellar and let them have it. They both know too much. I don't see how young Bowman ever found out I was in on the racket, anyway."

I stood there, waiting, listening.

Nothing happened. The girl was looking at me, her eyes very wide. She was scared. She had every right to be scared. We were in about the hottest spot we would ever be in—and live. I tried to stall. I had no chance.

Ryan shoved me toward the stairs, grabbed the girl's wrist and pushed her after me. The stairs were steep, ladderlike. My toe caught on the top step and I tumbled the full length to the bottom. The concrete was hard, and I didn't bounce. I lay there, inert, not moving.

The girl gave a little cry and came racing down after me. She started to bend down to see how badly I was hurt, but Ryan was right behind her.

He jerked her back and bent down himself. He shouldn't have done that, but he really thought I was out. I grabbed his gun hand in both of mine, twisted it. At the same time I brought up both feet and hit him hard in the stomach. He crashed down with a groan.

I caught up his gun, turned to see Hall at the top of the stairs, staring down at me. The gun in the race-track man's hand flashed. The bullet tore through the shoulder of my coat as I fired upward. I didn't miss. The bullet caught him in the chest. His big body folded up like an accordion and he rolled down the stairs. He was dead before he hit the floor.

There was noise above. I raised my gun again, then lowered it when I saw cops. The girl grabbed my shoulder, snatched for the gun.

"Run, Red! I'll cover you!"

She was a swell kid, to take a chance like that—but she was pretty confused when I didn't run.

It took me five minutes to explain to her that I'd sent for the cops myself; that they'd been late in arriving, or we wouldn't have been in a jam; that I'd had no evidence against Hall.

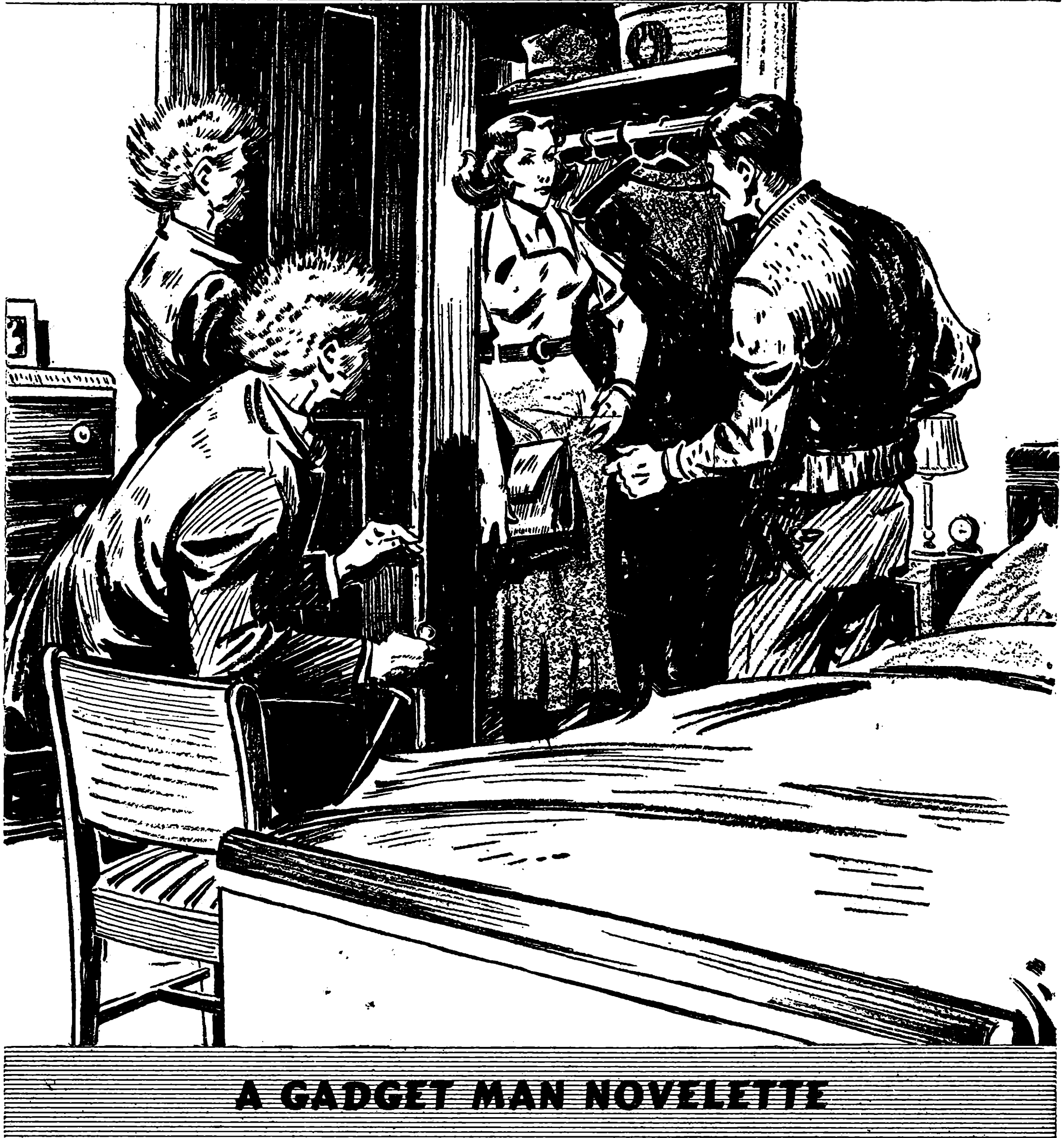
She looked at me. "Then who are you?"

I told her, "Red Drake . . . undercover man for the Racing Commission. The real Red Dunn is in jail downtown. We picked him up last week. You see, we suspected Hall, but had no evidence against him. I used you for bait to make him show his hand. I darned near got you killed. I hope you'll forgive me."

She did.

IT STARTED WITH SIX WHITE PIGEONS—
BUT IT ENDED DIFFERENTLY, WITH

SIX WHITE HORSES



A GADGET MAN NOVELETTE

BY LESTER DENT

Six White Horses

CHAPTER I.

THE STIFF-BACKED MEN.

IT was not six white horses when it started. It was six white pigeons.

To make it simpler, it started with one white pigeon. There was even some doubt about whether the pigeon was white. Because it was dark nighttime when the man ate it.

The man obviously did not eat the pigeon willingly. He ran into a hospital at two o'clock in the morning, screamed, "I ate a pigeon! Get it out of me!"

It developed that he had consumed the pigeon feathers and all.

He was not a large man, but he was one who would be noticed, for there was something about him—possibly the way he carried himself, with his chin pulled in and his shoulders cocked back—that gave him the manner of a man who followed a profession where it was necessary that he be stared at by people a great deal.

He also had calluses on the inside of his knees, although they didn't learn that immediately. What they—the doctors with the stomach pump—did discover was that the man had consumed a pigeon *au naturel,* feathers, claws, beak and all.

"Hide, hoof, warp and woof," as one of the doctors said.

The man died. They pumped him out; but in half an hour they were calling the coroner, who brought the police, who were responsible for reporters showing up. And so the matter got into the newspapers.

The newspaper make-up men gave it a No. 5 headline and stuck it back with the radio programs, on the theory that it was merely a case of a demented person having committed suicide, hence of no world-shaking importance.

But when another man ate a pigeon and died, it became a front-page story, as well as a headache for the police department.

The second victim also had a backbone as straight as a ramrod and a chin that was tucked in, and he died with dignity, sitting in a police squad car which was rushing him to a hospital; and he did not scream, nor groan, and his body only gave a great shudder as life left it.

This stranger also had eaten a pigeon. But not willingly—his clothing was disheveled and his body had some bruises, indicating he had been manhandled and made to eat the pigeon by force.

The police did not identify either victim. Neither dead man's fingerprints were on file in the police department, or in the F. B. I. records in Washington; and no one could be found who knew either by sight.

It was the same with the third man who died from pigeon-eating.

This one looked like the others, not that there was much probability of them being brothers, although they all had an I'm-being-looked-at carriage and calluses on the inside of their knees. They found him sitting on a park bench, near a spot where there had been quite a fight on the grass.

The third man had only downed about half a pigeon.

At that point, Clickell Rush decided to leave town.

CLICKELL RUSH was no clairvoyant, but he got the idea the dying pigeon-eaters were going to cause him trouble.

Rush had no connection with the matter. He did not know any of the straight-backed dead men, and did not have any more idea than the police what was behind the mystery.

Rush half suspected that, in getting disturbed, he was being about as reasonable as a citizen of Kansas who dashed for his cyclone cellar when he read they were having a typhoon in the China Sea.

But Rush had had a couple of experiences with this kind of thing in the past.

So he packed up. He put a pup tent, skillet, coffeepot in a shoulder packsack. He donned an old brown hat, brown sweater, brown pants, a pair of large brown shoes that had hobnails. He bought a ticket to the end of a railroad in the Canadian woods.

Rush was going to climb a mountain, or maybe shoot a bear, or at least do something that would entertain him or make him healthy—and do it as far away as he could comfortably get.

He bought a hunting rifle suitable for bears from a sporting-goods house and ordered it delivered to his apartment.

When a crate of white pigeons was delivered instead, Rush was, in his heart, not surprised.

He was far from speechless about it. He said things that should have scorched the wallpaper the shade of brown he liked in his handkerchiefs.

The crate was small and held three white pigeons, none of which was alive. He found the crate hanging from his doorknob by a string. Who had delivered it, he did not know.

That he had better get rid of that crate, Click Rush did know.

He put it in a tin bread box from the kitchen, soldered the lid shut, doing the soldering in the laboratory and workshop in one room of his apartment where he still invented gadgets. Then he wrapped the box in stout brown paper and addressed it to an imaginary person named "Edgar Swiss," care of general delivery at the local post office, and mailed the thing, being careful not to put a return address.

Coming back from the post office, Rush saw the unconscious girl.

RUSH did not find the girl himself. Someone else had discovered her lying in the gloom of a doorway, and a crowd had already gathered. Being possessed of a normal curiosity, Rush stopped and joined the neck-craners.

The girl was long, had hair the color of port wine, and a shape. Her face, when she was conscious, must be very alert and lively, because it was that now. She wore black, but not mourning black.

Having opened her eyes, she immediately tried to get up.

"Darn him!" she said. "Which way did he go?"

"Look here!" said a bystander excitedly. "Did some man assault you?"

The girl seemed to take herself in hand. She used her fingers to press her wine-colored hair back into place. Her fingernails, Rush noticed, were colored a wine tint to go with her hair. Only he did not think of it as a wine tint, but as ox-blood.

Since receiving the pigeons, Rush was inclined to look on the dark side of things.

"Take me to a hospital," the girl said.

As far as Rush knew, they took her to a hospital, for he went on about his business.

He spent that night in a tourist camp on the outskirts of the city, then appeared the next morning, pack on his back, to board a train for the Canadian wildwoods. He was going to ride in the day coach, because he liked the common-run, salt-of-the-earth people who ride in day coaches; and because he had learned that in paying out extra money for drawing-room accommodations, you buy little more than a state of mind. Also, he was inclined to be stingy.

The hand took his elbow as he was about to step into the day coach. The hand had some characteristics of a bear trap.

"I'm a police detective."

"Huh?"

"And you can consider yourself arrested."

THE man had shoulders which looked as if they had been laid out with a carpenter's square from a block of oak that had been cured the way they cure boat stems, by burying in mud under water for several years. The face was broad; mouth, nose, eyes and ears were small, giving the impression that something was missing.

Almost at once, Rush noticed the odor about the man. It was a vague smell, distinct. Not body odor, or perfume, or tobacco. Something different.

Rush said, "A mistake here somewhere. The name is Clarence Ruggles. See the initials on my packsack?"

"Oh, sure," the man said. "Edgar Swiss, too, isn't it?"

"Eh?"

"You know—at the post office, there's a package addressed to Edgar Swiss."

The man took handcuffs out of his pocket. "We learned you had mailed a package, and we got the post office to coöperate and turn over all the packages that looked like that one. We found one with a tin box. Its bottom fitted a mark in the dust in your pantry. You should dust your pantry more often. The two pigeons inside were loaded with cyanide. Three men have died lately from eating cyanided pigeons. Now what's the moral of such a story?"

Rush said, "What's that smell on your clothes?"

The man jingled his handcuffs. "Here, hold 'em out."

Rush said, "Listen, Detective—Oh . . . have you got a name?"

"Lieutenant Sweet," the blocky man said. "And you're Clickell Rush, who's had some notoriety under the nickname of the Gadget Man. Pleased to meet you. Now stick the wrists out so I can put this ironwork where it belongs."

Lieutenant Sweet took from Rush a pocketknife, money, railroad ticket; also seven small packages, no two of which were the same size. He stowed these packages in his coat, making the pockets bulge.

"On second thought," the man said, "I won't cuff you until we get outside. No sense drawing a crowd."

The day coach was at the tail end of the train. So they did not have far to walk to the station gate, where there was a long ramp that led up to doors, beyond which the waiting room was a high-vaulted white cavern that smelled faintly of ammonia, with a stone floor on which Rush's hobnailed shoes clicked and gritted.

They were half across the waiting room when Rush gave an excellent imitation of a man who had stumbled. He fell against Lieutenant Sweet, struck one of the packages in Lieutenant Sweet's left coat pocket—one of the parcels that had been taken from Rush—crushing the package.

A moment later, Lieutenant Sweet began to yell. He put back his head, then grabbed his eyes with his right hand. He struck Rush savagely, and Rush fell down.

Sweet then clutched at one of his coat pockets and began trying to empty it, endeavoring to remove one of the packages. But the package had split and mushroomed, so that it was now too big to come out. Sweet stopped tearing at the pocket and grabbed his eyes. He clutched the pocket again.

Rush, getting up and running across the waiting room, got away soon enough that the tear gas from the burst package in Sweet's pocket affected his eyes to only a minor extent.

Rush rode a taxicab from the station, and cried on his coat sleeve.

"Funny smell on that guy's clothes," he grumbled once.

Since early summer, Rush had been occupying a modernistic apartment in a new building on a street just off the theatrical district, where the sidewalks were perpetually crowded.

At the apartment-house door, there was no policeman. Nothing that looked like a plain-clothes man loitered on the sidewalk, and no green police car was parked in the block. Rush spent twenty minutes making sure.

Rush went up to his apartment.

The soft wax he had shoved in the keyhole before starting for the Canadian woods had been dislodged from the lock—by the insertion of a key, or a probe for picking the lock, would be a reasonable guess.

Rush struck matches, held their light close to the lock, looked for scratches inside, and found enough of them to convince him the lock had been picked with a sharp instrument.

Enough things were disturbed inside the apartment to show that it had been searched.

Missing items were: One gold watch; one high-school class ring, also gold; approximately twenty dollars in foreign money, which Rush had collected as souvenirs at various times when he was traveling.

Rush did some swearing.

"They weren't cops!" he said.

There was a knock on the front door. Rush went in haste to the back door, hoping to make a peacefully unnoticed departure down the rear stairs.

Leaning against the wall outside the back door, he found a man.

"Pardon me," the man said. "But we're looking for Arthur."

CHAPTER II.

QUEST FOR ARTHUR.

THE man was polite, small and old. He had a slight figure, a great deal of extremely white hair which he apparently combed straight out from his head, giving him, because of his deeply tanned face, the aspect of a Fiji Islander.

Rush moved a little to one side, studied the man's back. It was straight.

"We're looking for Arthur," the polite old man said.

"I wish I could help you," Rush said, "but—"

The man shrugged and made a slight gesture as if to button his boat. And in his right hand there was a misericord.

"Please let's not argue," he said.

Rush looked at the misericord. He happened to know it was a misericord, because he had once attended a lecture on ancient weapons and happened to remember it. The misericord had a blade long and thin, and designed to slip through a crack in a suit of armor and deliver the finishing touch to a fallen adversary.

"Back inside, if you please," the man said.

They walked into the apartment.

The knocking sounded on the front door again.

"Kindly let Hans in," suggested the man. "Doubtless he is becoming worried."

Hans was also a polite white-haired man, but taller. They were not brothers. But both combed their white hair straight out from their heads.

"Is he here, Karl?" Hans demanded quickly.

Karl fumbled with the buttons on his coat, and his misericord disappeared. The thing was carried in a coat-lining sheath, Rush decided.

"We'll look." Karl gave Rush a little bow. "If you'll pardon us."

Rush said, "Go right ahead."

They began looking for Arthur. They peered under the bed, opened the bureau drawers, then dragged the bureau out from the wall and looked behind it. Hans produced a misericord exactly like Karl's and repeatedly stuck the thick, comfortable mattress on the bed. They raised the carpet, scrutinized beneath it.

Rush asked, "Just what shape is this Arthur?"

They looked at him blankly.

"Well, is he shaped so he would be under the carpet?" Rush persisted.

"Arthur also has something we want," Karl said.

The search went on.

They found the girl in the vestibule clothes closet.

THE girl was leaning against the closet wall, lazy relaxation in the posture of her tall figure, something of resignation in the droop of her eyelashes.

She looked at Rush, said, "Darling, you assured me no one would look in here."

Rush swallowed his astonishment.

"Is either one of them your husband?" he asked.

The girl shook her head.

Both polite white-haired men began smiling knowingly.

"We're sorry," Hans said.

"Indeed we are," Karl agreed.

"You see," Hans explained, "we saw Arthur come into this apartment last night, and we thought he might still be here. We're very anxious to meet Arthur."

"Indeed we are," Karl agreed.

"Excuse us, please," Hans said.

"Yes, do," Karl said.

The two backed out of the front door, bowing from the waist and smirking a little. They closed the door.

Rush glued elbows to his ribs, began moving. He plunged into his workroom, going fast across the bare floor to a cabinet. Out of the cabinet he plucked a shotgun.

The shotgun was a pump type, sawed off. Rush had reloaded the shells with chemical pellets that would, if they got under the skin of man or beast, produce unconsciousness. He'd invented the pellets with the idea of selling them to police departments so they could take crooks alive, but no one had been interested.

His hobnailed shoes tore splinters out of the floor on the way to the door.

Hans and Karl were not in sight in the hall. Rush sprinted for the stairway at the end of the corridor.

Afterward, he suspected he hit the stair steps only twice on the way down—once on the back of his neck, and once on a lower portion of his anatomy. He landed spread out beside the shotgun.

Karl and Hans came back. Karl picked up the shotgun and tucked it under his arm.

Hans said, "Such an attractive lady really shouldn't have a husband."

Karl smirked.

They walked away, moving sidewise so that they could keep an eye on Rush, Karl with the shotgun under his arm.

Rush got up, limped to the door and watched a black coupé turn the nearest corner. Through the rear window, he could see their two fuzzy white heads.

He limped to the top of the stairs to examine the wire. It was a piano wire, black, not easy to notice, and they had stretched it from a radiator to the stair banister, where it was well placed for tripping purposes.

"I hope they find Arthur," Rush muttered.

He went into his apartment.

The girl had come out of the closet and was perched on a straight-backed chair, holding a large, gray handbag on her lap. Her frock was gray that matched the bag, as were her pumps and gloves. She wore no hat, and her wine-colored hair was a wealth.

Rush said violently, "I hope they find Arthur."

She looked at him blankly. "Who is Arthur?"

Rush shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. "But I do know who you are."

"You do?"

Rush said, "You're the girl I saw lying senseless in the street near here last night."

THE girl with the dark-red hair looked at him steadily.

"Don't get excited," she suggested. "I'm making the rounds of the neighborhood, trying to identify the footpad who hit me over the head last night."

At first, he had thought her voice was utterly calm and natural, but now he knew it wasn't; that she was only acting, acting so well that it had taken him these two or three minutes to realize that, inside, she was as scared as a pullet watching a hawk shadow.

Rush said, "Let's tell me about the pigeon-eaters."

She opened her mouth. "What?"

"I think you can."

The girl got up and moved toward the door. "You're not the footpad who slugged me, so I think I'll be going."

Rush started for her with the same stride a swimmer uses to go out on the high-diving board.

"Hadn't you better stay back?" she asked quietly.

Rush thought so, having looked over the gun she had taken out of her dress bosom.

His mistake had been in watching her large, gray handbag. If she had a weapon, he'd supposed it would be in there. But it wasn't; and her hand hadn't gone up to fumble nervously at her throat, as he'd thought.

Rush walked past her, closed the front door, locked it, removed the key and tossed it through the living-room window, which was open.

"Back door already locked," he said. "Karl locked it and took the key."

She kept the gun pointed at him. The gun was small, plain, thick, looked as if it had been constructed for the sole purpose of putting out good-sized bullets.

"Keep it aimed at me if it makes you feel better," Rush said. "And watch."

She said nothing.

"I think I know how I came to get mixed up in this," Rush explained. "I'm going to satisfy my curiosity."

IN the bedroom closet was a stout, fat suitcase; in the suitcase was a great deal of cotton, and inside the cotton nested the statue of a toad. The toad had a green back with warts, a potty, mud-colored stomach, and eyes that had about the same expression as the eyes of a fat, bald-headed man on a front-row seat at a burlesque show. The toad's mouth was open very wide.

Rush took the shade off an electric floor lamp and after some manipulating, managed to put the bulb into the toad's mouth without unscrewing it from the lamp. He switched on the bulb. The toad looked ridiculous, sitting there with a mouthful of lighted electric bulb.

Rush looked at the girl, asked, "This business crazy enough to suit you?"

She did not answer.

The toad began making a steady humming sound, the same kind of sound made by a radio which has been switched on and warmed up ready for operation.

Rush tapped the toad with a finger and made a speech.

"I found this on my table one day," he said. "That was some months ago. It has haunted me since. There is a wired-wireless apparatus inside the toad that can send and receive over the city light wires. You can't track down a wired-wireless transmitter with a direction-finder; so there's no way of telling the whereabouts of the person who, unless I'm mistaken, will shortly talk to us through the toad."

The girl's mouth was open slightly.

"Very cuckoo, eh?" Rush asked. "The party talking over the toad will disguise his voice. Hold something in his mouth, or talk through a tube, or something. You won't recognize the voice. Matter of fact, you won't know whether it's man or woman. I don't."

The girl kept her silence.

Rush held up a dramatic finger.

"Now," he said, "we'll see if the thing performs."

Rush leaned close to the toad's ear, said, "Anybody home?"

A rather horrible strangling sound came from the toad.

"Listen," the toad said, *"do you have to bother me so early in the morning?"*

The girl was surprised enough to point her gun at the ceiling.

Rush jumped for her.

CHAPTER III.

NO COP.

THERE seems to be grained in the nature of most men a liking for gimmicks, the average man being inclined to spend more time buying a fishing reel than he's willing to expend on an important business deal.

Clickell Rush was no exception. When he had bought his brown hobnailed mountain shoes, the spikes in the soles of the things had fascinated him so much that he had bought the shoes with the longest spikes he could find. He had confidence in those spikes.

When he started his jump for the girl, he was quite sure the spikes would dig in the floor and hold. They did not. The hardwood was too hard. The spikes slipped. Rush fell flat on his face almost exactly where he had been standing.

He rolled for the girl. She ran backward, would have gotten away except that she collided with a chair, went off balance. Rush got an ankle. It was a nice ankle. He got the girl down, they rolled on the floor, and Rush finally took the gun. He stood up.

"Poor beginning," he said in a pleased voice, "but not a bad ending."

The toad made its strangling

sound, then asked, *"What in the devil is going on there?"*

Rush ignored the toad.

The girl's handbag contained lipstick, compact, comb, some cartridges for her gun, but nothing to identify her.

"Want to tell me something about the pigeon-eaters?" Rush asked.

The toad said, *"What's going on, dammit? Hello, hello!"*

The girl clamped her lips on silence.

Rush put her gun in his coat, then spread his hands.

"I'm an inventor by trade," he said. "I've invented a whole flock of gadgets for solving crimes, figuring to sell them to different police departments. But the police departments are not interested. You see, my gadgets are so fantastic the cops claim they're not practical."

He peered at the girl to see if she understood.

The girl said, "I know who you are."

The toad strangled once more.

"Hello, hello!" it said. *"Blast it, hello!"*

Rush pointed at the toad.

"That is a nut," he said. "Whoever it is, it's a nut, and it's got money. It has a mania for seeing unusual crimes solved. It has been paying me ten thousand dollars for each case. Half of a ten-thousand-dollar bill arrives before each case, and the other half shows up when the case is ended. That's all I know about the toad and its voice. Except that it calls itself Bufa."

"Hello!" the toad said. *"Hello, hello!"*

Rush continued, "It's crazy. It's as crazy as can be. But what makes it worse is this: I don't want to solve any crimes. I don't want to work for this Bufa any more. But I can't quit. The thing won't let me."

"Hello!" the toad snarled.

Rush said, "Lately, this nut Bufa has been framing me. Fixing it so I have to solve crazy crimes to clear myself."

The toad rasped, *"Who's a nut?"*

Rush went over to the toad and leaned down.

"Who sent me those poisoned pigeons?" he asked.

"I did," the toad said.

"And who tipped the police I had them?"

"I did," said Bufa.

Rush looked at the girl, said, "You see?"

"Hello!" the toad yelled. *"What's going on there?"*

Rush jammed his fists hard on his hips and glared at the toad.

"Where," he asked, "is the half of a ten-thousand-dollar bill I generally get about the time you involve me in one of these messes?"

The toad made a strangling sound that was mirthful, said, *"It's time we had one on the house."*

"What?" Rush yelled.

"Heh, heh," the toad said. *"This time there won't be any ten thousand."*

Rush walked over and picked up the chair over which the girl had stumbled just before she lost her gun. He picked up the chair, held it as high as he could over his head, carried it back to the table on which the toad sat. He took a deep breath, held his tongue between his teeth.

He brought the chair down and made the toad quite shapeless.

The room was furnished with a small, ornate, modernistic table which had cost sixteen dollars and seventy-five cents. Rush kicked a leg off this, then went around the room twice grinding rage between his teeth.

He stopped, glared at the girl and began yelling.

"Now I want the truth out of you!" he bellowed.

Being howled at suddenly made the girl mad.

"Don't squall at me!" she snapped.

"Say—"

"You clown!" she yelled.

"Listen—"

The girl kicked him on the right shin.

"I wouldn't tell you anything, you maniac!" she screeched.

He gave up, went over to the window and stood there mopping his forehead and rubbing his jaw. The window looked down into the street, and after he had been there a few moments, he noticed the man in front of the furniture-store window.

The man was bending forward from the waist, moving his head from side to side like an owl, trying to determine from his reflection in a dressing-table mirror in the window, how his face looked.

Rush said, "Well, well!" with pleased violence.

He went to the room of his apartment which he had fitted up as a workshop, and where he still invented things, and got a small suitcase which he locked, leaving the key in the workroom.

He went back and took the girl's arm.

She tried to hold back all the while that Rush was dragging her out of the apartment. Her high heels scuffed the floor, she went through convulsions the entire distance down the stairs, and in the front doorway she managed to kick his right shin again.

He was handicapped because of his efforts to keep the small suitcase out of her reach, so she could not kick it or jar it.

They walked up to the man at the furniture-store window. He had taken out a handkerchief and was dabbing at his eyes.

IT was the blocky man with the cured-oak face who had introduced himself as Police Lieutenant Sweet at the railway station and endeavored to arrest Rush.

Rush came close enough to catch the queer, rather unpleasant odor that pervaded the man's clothing. He said, "I want a policeman."

The man jumped, butting the show window with his head, then turned around.

"Huh?" he said.

"We surrender," Rush explained.

The girl kicked and twisted, hissed, "You fool! What—"

"Sh-h-h!" Rush requested. "This nice square-headed policeman will want to ask you questions about pigeon-eating men."

There was suddenly a gun in the blocky man's hand.

"I got a car over there," he said grimly.

It was a black car, a sedan, about such a machine as a police department would furnish one of its detectives. There was a foot rail across the rear floor, and the blocky man handcuffed their ankles to this.

The man then took a roll of black adhesive tape from a door pocket. He held the tape in his hands while he peered at Rush.

"Mind telling me what you think you're doing?" the man asked.

Rush said, "Mind telling me what makes you smell that way?"

The man glared, said harshly, "I asked you what you think you're doing!"

"Fooling a toad."

"Toad?"

"It's a little complicated," Rush admitted. "The toad framed me and expects to have fun watching me clear myself. I'm fooling the toad. I'm going to sit this one out."

"Sit it out?"

"In jail," Rush explained.

The man showed his adhesive tape. "Lie down," he ordered.

"Now wait a minute—"

The blocky man speared Rush with the gun muzzle, made him lie flat, then stuck strips of the tape across Rush's mouth, gagging him. He muffled the girl in the same fashion. Then he put his gun back in his clothing.

"Just to get the record clear," he growled, "I'm not a cop."

He put the suitcase on the front seat, then got behind the wheel.

CHAPTER IV.

ARTHUR'S FARM.

THERE was enough wind to shake the tops of the trees along the country road, and enough morning sunlight to make the interior of the car uncomfortably warm. The road was a dirt one, rutted, dusty.

The dust squirmed in a brownish funnel behind the machine, and there was no carpet to cover the cracks between the car floorboards; so that dust had swirled up into the machine and added another shade of brown to the outdoor clothes which Rush still wore.

Faint odor from the clothing of the burly man had pervaded the car.

Rush kept silent, made faces, and worked on the handcuff locks with the hairpin which the girl, by shaking her head violently, had managed to loosen from her dark-red hair.

As soon as he had the handcuff off, he stood up and took the blocky man by the neck. The car was grinding up a hill in low gear, so it seemed as good a time as any.

The blocky man did not excite easily. He knocked the car out of gear, yanked on the emergency brake.

Sudden stoppage of the machine toppled Rush over into the front seat with the man. The windshield was an immediate casualty of the fight. It was a shatterproof windshield, and it cracked, bulged like cardboard, but did not leave its frame. Rush slammed the man against the door, trying to stun him. The door lock ripped out, and they were in the dust.

Rush scooped up dust, tried to blind his face. The other man had the same idea. Neither succeeded.

Rush began trying to shove the other, feet first, under the car, where he would be handicapped. The result was that they were both shortly under the car, trying to bump each other's heads on the chassis, but mostly skinning themselves.

Finally, Rush got the gun. He scrambled out on one side of the car.

The blocky man scrambled out on the other side.

Rush tried to yell, "Hands up!" but only gave a loud honk through his nose. The tape gag was still in place. He tore it off.

He did not, however, yell anything.

The behavior of the blocky man took his words. The man had frozen, and was staring back along the road. He shaded his eyes with his hands, strained them.

There was another car approaching. It came fast, a coupé, and through the windshield could be seen two men who had white hair that stuck out from their heads—Karl and Hans, the pair who had been looking for "Arthur."

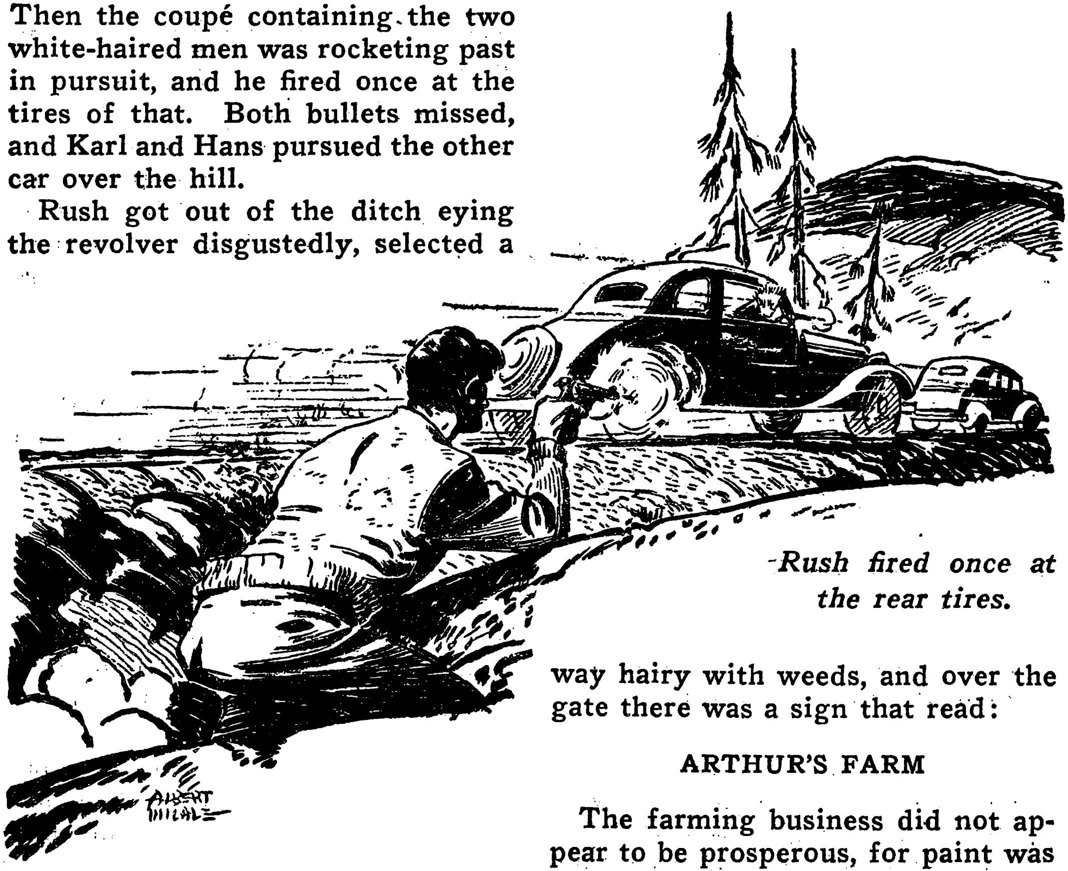
One white-haired man—Karl—leaned out of the charging coupé with a revolver, and a bullet passed Rush with a sound that might have been made by someone who had coughed into a flute.

Rush backed into the roadside ditch, tried to make himself as small on the bottom of the ditch as possible.

The blocky man sprang into the sedan. The machine took off.

Rush fired once at the rear tires. Then the coupé containing the two white-haired men was rocketing past in pursuit, and he fired once at the tires of that. Both bullets missed, and Karl and Hans pursued the other car over the hill.

Rush got out of the ditch eying the revolver disgustedly, selected a clod no more than ten feet away, aimed at the clod and shot. He missed the clod almost a yard.



Rush fired once at the rear tires.

He threw the revolver as far as he could into the adjacent woods.

IT was two hours later when Rush stopped a rented roadster far out in the country. He sat in the roadster a few minutes and listened to the small, portable radio direction-finder which stood on the seat beside him. He had lost time going back, but there was no help for that.

Finally, he took the "finder" headset off his ears, dropped it on the seat, and left the roadster. He walked a quarter of a mile along a dusty road, stopping often to listen, before he came to what seemed to be his destination.

The place was entered by a driveway hairy with weeds, and over the gate there was a sign that read:

ARTHUR'S FARM

The farming business did not appear to be prosperous, for paint was scabbing off the sign, the graveled drive needed work with a shovel in addition to weed cutting, and inside the gate there was a house which looked as if it was about to lie down.

All around was jungle, and a smell. The same smell that had been on the blocky man's clothing.

Rush muttered, "We better take precautions about that smell."

He took a bottle from his clothing, uncorked it, and poured the contents up and down the sleeves of his coat, and on the coat skirts. The stuff had a pungent odor that was stronger than the smell in the air.

"Phew!" Rush said.

He passed the gate up and crawled through the weeds to a point near the house, where he crouched for a while and watched the sedan in which the blocky man had been hauling Rush and the girl. The windshield damaged in the fight had been knocked out, all the glass removed from the frame.

One front door of the car was open, and Rush could see, lying on the floor, his suitcase. Doubtless the little radio transmitter inside the case was still putting out the steady buzzing signal which he had traced down with the direction-finder.

RUSH grimaced. He had suspected, even in the railway station, that the blocky man was no policeman. The radio had been a precaution; he had used it before to trace a quarry.

He sat and scowled about the smell in the air. It was like something that might come up if a man ate a raw hamburger and then belched.

He went into the house through an open window.

It was empty, although all the rooms had been lived in recently.

There was a huge refrigerator in the kitchen, and in it at least four hundred pounds of raw meat.

Only one other room was interesting. There were many animal pictures on the walls, also pictures of circuses and autographed photos of circus performers.

But it was the pictures of the horses and riders that made the room interesting. The horses were wonderful white animals. They were depicted doing all the tricks of the trained animals called "high-school" horses. In some of the pictures, the riders stood beside the animals. The riders were all straight-backed men.

Labels on each picture said:

SPANISCHE RIDING SCHOOL
VIENNA, AUSTRIA

There was only one picture of six white horses together. The six white horses stood in a row, harnessed to a carriage, and the harness was incredibly elaborate. That photograph was labeled:

IMPERIAL CARRIAGE OF
AUSTRIA

Judging from the autographs on the pictures, the "Arthur" who owned Arthur's Farm was a man who made his living by importing, from Europe, wild animals and trained horses for American circus use.

There was one picture of Arthur.

Arthur was the blocky man who had claimed to be a police lieutenant named Sweet.

Rush jumped violently when someone dumped something heavy on the front porch, making a loud clatter.

A voice with a pronounced Austrian accent said, "It might be that Karl and Hans would not find the harness."

Arthur said, "We won't take chances. My car is faster than that coupé of theirs, and I lost them. But they may show up.

Rush, taking a chance and looking through the window, saw that there were only two of them—Arthur and a straight-backed man—and that they were dumping harness on the porch.

CHAPTER V.

HARNESS FOR SIX WHITE HORSES.

THE harness was soiled with damp earth, so evidently it had been buried somewhere on the farm, and they were digging it up in preparation for moving it to some other hiding place.

It was the harness that was on the six white horses in the picture hanging on the wall—the royal harness for the Imperial Carriage of Austria. The massive stuff that, in the pictures, had appeared to be about all the weight the horses could carry.

Looking at the picture, it had not occurred to Rush that the harness for the Imperial Carriage of Austria might be sheathed with solid gold and crusted with jewels.

The straight-backed man took out a handkerchief and carefully wiped dirt off the jeweled headstall of a bridle.

"It's a shame," he muttered. "All dirty."

He was a wiry man, small but athletic-looking. His face was long, and there was fear in the warp of his mouth.

Arthur staggered up with another heavy set of harness, dumped it on the porch, and stood panting.

"Dirt won't hurt it," he said.

The other shrugged gloomily. "I wish we'd never tried this," he muttered.

Arthur scowled at him. "Listen, there's a quarter of a million dollars' worth of gold in this stuff. All we have to do is melt it down, then go to Nevada, make a show of finding a gold vein, and peddle the stuff. The jewels we can have cut up later."

The other shook his head. "There's enough money in it," he said. "That's not what I meant."

"Well, stop grousing!" Arthur snapped. "We got away with it, didn't we? When Hitler marched into Austria, there was enough confusion that we got the harness out of the museum all right. And I was taking a shipment of tigers out of Austria at the time, so we got the harness out, too. Customs men don't go into tiger cages and look to see if they've got double floors. You saw that. We're in the clear."

The other put his handkerchief away. "We're not clear of Hans and Karl."

"We will be."

The straight-backed man spread his hands. "What I mean," he said, "is that we shouldn't have gotten drastic with Karl's brother."

Arthur swore violently, said, "Karl's brother was going to take half the proceeds, because copping the harness was his idea. We couldn't have that, could we?"

"We could have given him an argument."

"So what?" Arthur snorted. "We gave him a poisoned pigeon for dinner, instead."

"Yes," the other reminded ruefully. "Then Karl and Hans fed two of us poisoned pigeons. There's only you and I left. And they'll feed us pigeons if they can catch us."

"They haven't caught us, and they haven't got the harness."

"No." The other seemed cheered. "We were foresighted enough to bury the harness."

Karl came out of the weeds then.

"And kind enough to dig the harness up again," he said.

RUSH, gripped by a bad premonition, whirled.

Hans was standing across the room holding, by the tip of its needle-shaped blade, the dagger which had been designed to penetrate through the cracks of ancient armor. Hans put a finger to his lips for silence.

"We found your car, of course," he said, and added, "I trust you believe me when I say I can throw this dagger as straight as you can shoot."

"Straighter, probably," Rush muttered.

"Just step outside."

Arthur and his accomplice gaped at Rush when he came out. They were standing with their hands held far up.

Hans said, "Isn't there a girl?"

"There should be," Karl admitted.

Hans went looking, and came back soon dragging the long, red-headed young woman, who kept trying to kick him, although her ankles and wrists were both handcuffed and she was gagged.

"I don't understand," Hans said, "who she is or how she got mixed up in this?"

"What about him?" Karl pointed at Rush. "Do you understand how he got in it?"

Arthur, still holding his hands up, jerked his chin at Rush.

"I'll tell you how it was about this guy," he said. "I got a note about him. It said he knew about the pigeon business, and had three poisoned pigeons. I watched him, found out he mailed a package and managed to get it. The pigeons were inside in a can from his apartment. I searched his place and found where the can had set in a cupboard."

Arthur spread his hands. "I got jittery and decided to get him out of the way. I didn't know what to think about him. The note just said he was mixed up in it. A note signed by somebody I never heard of."

Rush said, "By Bufa?"

"So you know who sent it!" Arthur growled. "How'd he find out about this?"

"Figured it out, maybe," Rush said. "Realized the men who died from eating pigeons were riders from the Spanische Riding School in Vienna, and checked up on men here in New York who might have a connection with the Spanische Riding School. You had a connection. You've bought high-school horses from the Spanische School. So maybe he sent the note to you just on a chance. Bufa's whole idea was to get me involved in this."

"Who's Bufa?"

"A toad."

All of them except the girl scowled at Rush as if they thought he was picking a bad time for a poor gag.

Rush said, "That's all right. Nobody ever believes me."

Hans pointed at the girl. "Who is she?"

"I don't know." Arthur shook his head. "I was trailing this Rush, watching for a chance to grab him and get him out of the way, on account of that note saying he knew too much. I saw the girl trailing him, too."

Rush eyed the girl, said, "So *you* were trailing *me?*"

Arthur ignored the interruption. "Last night," he explained, "I slugged her in a dark doorway and searched her. But there wasn't nothin' on her to show who she was or why she was watching this Click Rush guy."

Arthur stared steadily at Rush, but finally stopped that and turned his square, oak-hard face to the two white-haired old men. He gave them a grin that was more hopeful than hearty.

"Why not be reasonable?" he asked. "There's only four of us left, and a four-way split isn't bad. So why not be reasonable."

"We'll be reasonable," Hans said mildly.

"Very reasonable," Karl agreed in the same tone.

Arthur turned pale, the oak of his face beginning to look as if it had been out in the weather a great deal.

THE two old men walked them for fifty feet through the weed-and-brush jungle behind the house to an iron gate that had a huge lock and was swung from concrete posts. Other concrete posts supported a fence of woven wire that was as thick as pencils, and topped with six tense strands of barbed wire. Inside this fence were cages made out of steel and roofed over with more steel.

The white-haired men stopped at the gate and looked at Arthur.

"They're not tame, are they Arthur?" Hans asked.

Arthur opened and shut his mouth, words apparently sticking in his horrified throat.

They didn't look tame to Rush. They were tigers mostly, tigers that appeared to measure an average of fourteen feet including tails. Two cages held lions, each lion with a head that seemed as large as that of a hippopotamus.

Hans said, "Karl, I think there is some horse meat in the refrigerator in the house."

"Yes. I believe Arthur keeps it there."

"Will you get some?"

Karl departed. Hans kept a close watch on Rush, the girl, Arthur and the straight-backed man, holding his thin knife in one hand and a revolver in the other. When Karl came back, he was carrying a dish pan heaped high with raw meat.

Hans said, "I understand animals become more dangerous when they are feeding."

Arthur began to shake. "Listen, I'll give you my cut—"

"Rub the meat over them," Hans said. "Put chunks of it in their pockets."

Odor of the meat had reached the big cats in the cages, and they began to prowl. A lion roared. A tiger jumped, clung high up on the bars of its cage, then fell back to the floor, landing on its feet.

The odor of the animals, the smell that pervaded the farm and Arthur's clothing, was much stronger here.

Rush growled, "It looks like you figure on feeding us to the lions."

Hans showed his teeth viciously. "The tigers, too. They're man-eating tigers, in case you didn't know."

Karl came to Rush with chunks of the raw meat and rubbed. Rush decided that he would never again care for the sight or odor of raw meat.

"Inside!" Hans ordered harshly.

They were forced through the gate into the animal inclosure. The fence, it appeared, was a safety measure in case some of the cats should escape the cages. Two lions were roaring now, and more of the tigers were snarling.

Hans said, "We will tie them, Karl."

Karl nodded, snarled at the prisoners, "Lie down!"

Rush stared at them, asked hollowly, "You're going through with this?"

Hans nodded. "Why not? There's enough money at stake. Everyone who knows anything about it is right here."

Rush took two steps and reached the girl. He picked her up.

"In that case," he said, "I'll just walk into a cage. I don't like the idea of being tied up when they eat me."

The girl screamed, began to fight frenziedly. Rush walked backward with her, almost running to a cage.

He picked a tiger cage, the biggest one. It held six striped maneaters, snarling and jumping against the bars. Moving fast, Rush reached the cage while Hans and Karl still stared at him, dumfounded.

"Stop!" Hans yelled suddenly, and lifted his gun.

Rush dived for the cage door, wrenched at the fastening, got it open.

The girl made gurgling voices of horror as Rush went into the cage with her.

RUSH left the cage door wide open.

He kept low, dived for a concrete mound which was there for the tigers to sit upon, topped by a stump of a tree that was rutted where the big cats had sharpened their claws.

The tigers came for him, all six together.

"Scat!" he yelled beseechingly.

The cats stopped. One of them, bouncing forward in easy leaps, almost reached them, then halted so suddenly that its claws raked up sparks on the concrete cage floor. It went down flat, snarling. Then it jumped back.

Hans shrieked, "Karl! Close that cage door!"

Rush changed his course, veered around behind the tigers, got to the shelter of the concrete mound.

He took off his coat and threw it at the tigers.

"Scat!" he roared.

The tigers went out of the cage, one in the lead, the others following, and Hans began to screech in terror and fire his gun as rapidly as he could pull trigger.

Rush, standing up, saw that all the tigers were out of the cage; saw also that the four men—Hans, Karl, Arthur and the other man—were interested only in their own lives.

Rush ran to the cage door and closed it.

Karl and the others had reached the fence gate, and might have gotten out safely had they not stopped to fight. Karl and Hans were trying to keep the other two men in the cage. Arthur had hold of the key—the gate lock was equipped with a key—when Hans shot him.

After the bullet struck, Arthur jumped and jerked the key out of the lock, fell to the ground, and while having dying spasms, threw the key entirely across the inclosure beyond the reach of any of them.

Rush ran back and got behind the concrete mound so he would not have to see what was happening.

IT was four o'clock in the afternoon before Rush's yelling drew the attention of a passing motorist, who went for the State police.

The girl was still pale. Rush had not let her get out from behind the concrete mound, and she had not wanted to after he had explained what she would see.

She shuddered. "You say they didn't attack us because—"

"Because of some stuff from a bottle I put on my clothes," Rush explained patiently. "There was cat odor on this Arthur's clothes all along, and I recognized it. Just to play safe, when I went back to my apartment to get the radio, I got a bottle of the stuff. It's a chemical odor that drives tigers and lions away. Drives away any kind of cats, in fact."

She shook her head slowly.

He said, "Seems a bit nuts, eh?"

"At least," she said shakily, "I never heard of such a thing before."

Rush grimaced. "It's one of my more sensible inventions. I sold this one, which is more than I've been able to do with the others. Sold it to one of the biggest animal trainers in the country . . . one of those circus guys that works in a cage with thirty lions and tigers. He says it works every time."

She frowned at him.

"If it works every time, why haven't we walked out of here, instead of sitting in this cage all day?"

Rush looked at the tigers. They were the biggest tigers he had ever seen, and they were walking around and around the cage, looking in.

"The cage suits me," he decided.

After awhile, the State police came and drove the tigers away.

Later, city police arrived, and fell to pumping the girl's hand.

"Take care of that gold harness," the girl suggested. "Our case of the pigeon-eating men is all solved."

Rush frowned at her. "So you're a cop?"

She nodded. "Policewoman. They have them, you know."

"Yeah, but how come—"

"I was assigned to work on you. Get your confidence and find out what you knew about poisoned pigeons."

"But—"

"We got one of those notes from Bufa, saying you were worth investigating. The same kind of note that I suppose the man named Arthur got."

"You really believe there's a Bufa, and he, or it, involved me in this."

"Of course."

Rush grinned at her.

"Glory be!" he said. "First time a cop ever believed the thing. I'll give you what's left of the toad for a souvenir."

When they went to get the toad, there was an envelope lying among the remains. It was an envelope that had not been there before, plain white and without an address.

Rush's grin pushed back his ears.

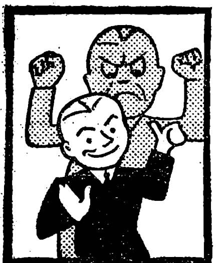
"You see that?"

"The envelope, you mean?" the girl asked.

"It's the kind of envelope," Rush explained gleefully, "in which Bufa always sends the other half of a ten-thousand-dollar bill when a case is done."

Rush opened the envelope. Printing on the sheet of plain white paper inside said:

THIS ONE WAS ON THE HOUSE, REMEMBER? BUFA.



WHAT HAPPENED TO CROSS-PATCH?

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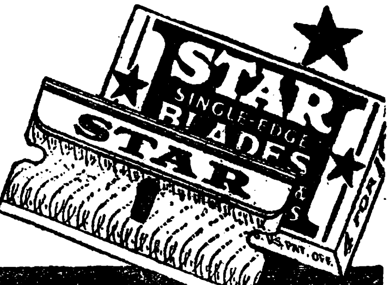


STAR SINGLE-EDGE **BLADES 4 FOR 10¢**

FOR GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS

DOING BUSINESS ON THE CURB
ALMOST GOT DALY IN THE GUTTER!

STANDING ROOM ONLY

BY ARTHUR J. BURKS

Standing Room Only

CHAPTER I.

SIDEWALK CLIENT.

RED-HEADED, grim-jawed Jack Daly had just got his papers as a full-fledged private detective, with authority to go armed, when the bottom fell out of the agency which had given him the job.

It would have been a heartbreaking setback to anybody but Daly. He'd come to Washington, D. C., to stay, and he meant to stay. It was the world's most exciting city, the world's *only* city, to Daly. Anything could happen there, and did. It was, in many ways, the world's most thrilling melting pot.

The agency closed its doors and the manager of it left for parts unknown, just two days before Jack was to receive his first pay check. He'd looked forward to that check.

But when he got the news it didn't bother him. He grinned, flicked his broad-brimmed hat with a forefinger, said to himself:

"That's swell! I wanted to go into business for myself, anyhow."

With no capital, however, and no office, he realized that there would be difficulties. He walked out of the building which he had already come to regard as belonging to him, because he worked there, onto Pennsylvania Avenue. He knew better than to look in his pockets for the money to rent an office of his own. He knew exactly what his pockets contained—nothing, not even fragments of cigarette tobacco.

The fact bothered him not at all. He could promote himself something. He didn't know where, or how, or whom. He didn't know a soul in the Capital City.

But down around Sixth Street, the idea came to him. A sidewalk detective agency. He'd never heard of such a thing. It might work. He could pick his clients from passers-by; and if he guessed right, it was as much as any detective could expect anyhow.

He stood and watched the crowds, this face and that—hundreds of faces, thousands of faces—until the blonde passed.

Jack Daly saw her, froze. She looked at him, hesitated. He could see trouble in her eyes. He guessed that she was running away from something. And she was nice, for though she hesitated, she hurried on past. He could expect nothing else, as a stranger to her. And he liked her the better for it. There was something about her that made his heart hammer faster. Maybe he'd found a client; maybe a friend. Maybe—

He followed her, at a safe distance, ready to swing to the curb or turn his back if she looked around. But she didn't look around. She continued her swift walk up Pennsylvania Avenue, on the south side. Men and women jostled her, but she didn't seem to notice.

She'd gone two blocks, without looking around, when Daly discovered that a car was pacing her, across the Avenue, and that she had discovered it. She hesitated again, as though to turn into Eighth Street. He could almost see her mind work. If she went into Eighth Street, she would play right in with whoever was in that car—if its occupants were interested in her.

The slowness of the car, the girl's terror, and the fact that she looked so steadily at the slow-moving car that more people bumped into her than before, convinced Jack Daly that here was something. Just what, he wouldn't know until he mixed into it—after something started popping.

THE car suddenly speeded up, dashed ahead of her, turned left across the Avenue. Rubber tires shrieked on the pavement as other cars braked down to avoid collisions. The car that swerved screamed when its tires slid in the quick handling the chauffeur gave it.

Jack Daly caught a glimpse of a chauffeur, in uniform, and three men in a back seat, who leaned well back against the cushions as though to avoid recognition.

The girl looked like a frightened chicken, not knowing where to go, unable to make up her mind. The car swung into the curb. Nobody got out of it.

But the girl stopped, stiffly, staring at the car. As nearly as Daly could tell, as he sprinted forward, nobody in the car did or said anything. But the girl started moving slowly toward the door, as though hypnotized.

Daly knew she didn't want to go. He knew that she was numb with terror, like a bird mesmerized by a snake. His feet hammered the pavement to reach her. But she was in the car before he could do anything about it. He could see her white face as the car got under way, shot out from the curb. It looked as though she had been slammed back against the cushions. One of the trio in back now occupied a jump-seat, turned so that he could see what happened to the girl.

The car shot past. Nobody in it paid Jack Daly the slightest heed. Daly, however, got the license number of the car. It was a Maryland license. He looked about frantically for a cab. One answered his beckoning hand by swerving almost as madly as the big car had, and slamming against the curb. Daly jumped in.

"Follow that Maryland car!" he shouted. "Five dollars if you keep it in sight to its destination, without its occupants getting wise to you."

"Right!" said the cabby.

He got away fast in his turn, swinging to the inside traffic lane, so that two lanes were between him and the car he was pursuing. Daly didn't have taxi fare; he didn't have the five dollars he had promised. If he didn't get in touch with his client before the end, he'd probably go to jail.

But he didn't expect to do that. That girl hadn't gone willingly with the three men in that car. She'd been forced to go. Maybe, he thought, the muzzle of a gat shown over the top of the door, the soft mouthing of her name. Naturally he didn't know that name, but he meant to get it before he was finished.

"Faster!" he snapped at the driver. "This is legal business!"

After all, he thought grimly, he *was* a private detective, with papers to show for it. And he was getting excited with the chase. The car ahead stopped for a light.

Daly's cab drew up alongside—alongside, that is, but for two intervening cars. Daly looked idly across the two cars at the girl.

She was looking straight to the front, and her face was white as death. She wasn't moving. She looked like a statue. Daly diagnosed a gat muzzle against her side. He got a good look at the faces of the three men, and they looked like faces that would go with gats. His heart hammered with increasing excitement.

Was the girl being kidnaped? Who was she? No telling who, exactly, anyone was in Washington. The Maryland license plate didn't mean much of anything, for anybody who did business in Washington might live in Maryland, or Virginia, or anywhere within driving distance of the teeming metropolis.

THE lights changed. The girl turned her head slightly, as though she had felt Daly's eyes upon her. He had looked for some time, when he noticed that none of the men in the car looked to right or left, and she caught him looking at her the second time today.

Her eyes widened. He sincerely hoped she wouldn't do anything to draw the attention of her captors—if captors they were—to him. He thought that he saw frantic appeal in her face, covered almost at once as with a mask, when she rubbed the expression out by an effort of will.

"Yes," said Daly, "keep that car in sight by all means!"

"I got you the first time, buddy," said the cabby plaintively. "This won't call for any shootin', will it?"

"Maybe yes, maybe no. In law business you never can tell."

"Well, I'm ducking fast if there is. So maybe you'd better pay me now."

Daly shook his head.

"I don't know how long we have to follow the car, or whether you *can* keep it in sight. So, no pay until you've taken me where I want to go, the way I want you to."

He'd got around that rather neatly, he thought. If the cabby were a good chess player, he would now make another move: ask to see the color of Daly's money. But he didn't do that, principally because he was under way again, doing a good job of tailing.

The car ahead slid down to Union Station, then started back in the general direction of Dupont Circle. The cabby obviously knew his Capital, for now he didn't follow directly, but took to other streets, apparently confident of anticipating the moves of his quarry.

They were nearing Dupont Circle when the cabby swore.

"They're around here some place," he said, "but I think I've lost them. We'll turn into this street and see if we can spot them. I'd know that car anywhere."

Daly leaned out the door, looked up and down the street. He couldn't spot the car they had been following.

A man edged out from the wall of a building across the sidewalk, and Daly didn't see him until the man's body masked Daly from view of passers-by. Then Daly, hearing a grim voice, looked up.

"Looking for somebody, sucker?" said the voice.

CHAPTER II.

TALK—OR ELSE!

IT was the face of one of the men in the other car. That man had ridden in the jump-seat. Now he had his right hand in his pocket, and Daly didn't like the shape of the pocket caused by something obviously rigidly grasped by the invisible hand.

"Maybe," said Daly. "Why?"

"Perhaps I could help you?" said the other. His eyes were green, like those of a cat. There was murder in them, Daly thought. He was as big as Daly. "Come on out and let's see. I know this section thoroughly."

Daly got out. The man moved close, put something small and round and hard against the small of Daly's back. The cabby said:

"What about my fare, and the five bucks you promised me for keeping that car in sight?"

"Interested in cars, too, eh?" said the man softly. Then, to the cabby: "G'wan, chump. Collect some other time! See this gadget I'm holding against your pal? Well, it ain't a stick of candy, and I've got your number. So you'd better not say anything around, see? Beat it!"

"But my dough!"

Daly grinned at the man. "See me at my office in the morning," he said. That was good, he thought. But he had no intention of gypping the man. "I'll be standing on the southeast corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Sixth Street at nine o'clock tomorrow morning. At the exact spot where you picked me up at my office. Come there and get paid."

"You'll be lucky if you're *standing anywhere* tomorrow morning!" said the man with the green eyes. "Get moving. Right down the street!"

The cabby swore. Daly debated with himself the advisability of taking a poke at his captor, but decided against it. The man's trigger finger might be nervous; and there were plenty of men in the world who, when they stuck a gat against a man, had no scruples about using it.

Besides, the getaway was set, for now a car pulled up alongside them, traveling slowly. The chauffeur was in it, but the two other men and the girl were gone.

"Get it?" said Green Eyes. "That's for me, just in case you don't behave!"

Daly stepped out smartly, and Green Eyes kept pace with him. At his left side now, very close. Daly didn't feel chagrined because of the ease with which he had been captured. It couldn't have happened any way that would have suited him better. Here was a link connecting him with the girl who'd been so scared. Maybe he'd be taken to her, or to the two men who'd helped take her away.

Out in the street, the other car moved ahead, slowed down, slid back; but never got far enough away to make it difficult for Daly's captor to sprint for it if he had to.

"In here," said Green Eyes, turning Daly into the gloomy doorway of a four-story, red-brick front. One of Washington's old buildings, Daly decided, with a history to it going back to the Civil War. The old houses of Washington could tell plenty if they could talk—but never as much as the faces of passers-by told without intending to.

Green Eyes opened the door.

Daly slid through into a gloomy stairwell.

"Upstairs," said Green Eyes tersely.

Daly started up. He climbed two flights before Green Eyes told him a number to seek. Green Eyes bade him knock on a door. Daly did.

It opened. One of the other two men thrust forth his head. Other steps sounded on the stairs, and Daly looked back. The chauffeur was climbing swiftly up, pulling off his long, black, gauntleted gloves.

GREEN EYES pushed Daly into a big room. Its blinds were drawn, and dusty electric-light globes filled the room with a lemonish glow. Across the room, in a chair four sizes too big for her, sat the girl from the Avenue. She looked at Daly without expression in her face. Even her eyes told him nothing. He tried to keep his own face as mask-like, thinking she was giving him a cue.

Green Eyes slammed the door. Daly heard a lock catch. One of the other men fanned Daly expertly, got his Police Positive and his papers of identification.

He whirled on the girl, snarling:

"A *dick!* What's the idea, Marian? Who is this lug? Where did you pick him up?"

"It was my own idea," said Daly hastily, noting that the girl didn't quite know how to answer, and obviously did not wish to deny him entirely—which made his heart leap with the feeling that she wanted to keep him within reach. "I saw her, see? I thought she was a swell number, so I started tagging her!"

"With gun and badge and papers, eh? Likely story! What about it, Marian? What are you trying to pull on us?"

"Nothing! I don't know this man's name, never saw him until I passed him on the street—"

The snarling one crossed the room in a single bound. His left palm smacked across the right cheek of the girl he called Marian. Angry red fingerprints jumped into view. The girl's head spun on her shoulders. Daly thought her neck must surely be broken by the wallop.

Daly didn't wait to find out. He leaped in his turn, whirled the slugger with a hand on his shoulder, started a blow for his jaw—when a numbing blow took him on the temple.

Through a filmy haze of pain filled with red dots, Daly saw the man he had slugged lunge against the girl, then carom to the floor. He realized, without feeling them particularly, that blows were being rained upon his head. Blows of fists, of gat muzzles. The other three men were working on him.

But Daly didn't go down. He fought out like a punch-drunk fighter. He staggered all about the place. They had ganged on him and were doing a scientific job of beating him up. He hadn't the slightest idea what it was all about, but things were happening, and that was something. He reeled and rocked with the blows. When he could, he looked through tortured eyes at the girl, saw that she was coming around.

She straightened jerkily, stared dully at the fighting group. Then she half lifted her hand as though in protest—and the lights went out for Jack Daly. He saw the floor coming up toward his face. He felt it against his face, but it didn't hurt. It didn't have time to hurt, for he was out, really, when he struck.

HE came to in darkness, thinking he had gone blind. He listened carefully for the sound of breathing, heard a faint thread of sound, off in the dark somewhere. Probably Marian, Jack Daly decided. He couldn't hear anybody else. He sat up, groaning.

He heard someone moving, haltingly, draggingly, as though that someone's feet were hobbled. The sound came toward the dick. He could hear no other. He lifted his bound hands before his eyes, could see their black outline. He wasn't blind. He'd been out a long time.

Also, Daly found that he was bound, wrists and ankles, and gagged. It was a painful experience. He'd have to do something about it. Little hopping sounds told him of the progress of the other person in the room, toward him.

The girl bumped against him, fell, and there was nothing he could do about it. He held his breath, lest she strike her head and pass out.

But she twisted, by the sound, and struck on her back instead. Then, after a pause, she wriggled into position, fumbled over Daly—and he got the idea right away. She was going to try to unfasten his bonds with her teeth. Just how she could do it, gagged, he didn't know. Maybe she hadn't thought of it herself. But she soon did, and a low moan escaped her.

Daly pushed out his hands, found hers. His fingers were reasonably free, and he could untie her wrists. When they were free, they jumped instantly to the back of his head, unfastened the gag. He spat it out, did a like job for her. Her face was wet, and he had a sneaking hunch the wet stuff was blood. She, too, had been hammered around. Daly knew that he himself had taken a real battering, and that his recent movements on coming to had started his wounds bleeding again. Otherwise he felt all right. A splitting headache, but headaches were better than being dead. She put her hand over his mouth. It was shaking uncontrollably.

"Whisper," she said. "They may be listening somewhere. I thought you were never coming around. I've been listening for hours. It's after dark now."

"Jack Daly," he said. "Detective. Chief detective of the . . . er . . . of the S R O Agency!"

Not bad, he thought; but you couldn't tell a prospective client that your office was the sidewalk, could you? It might be difficult to make her take you seriously.

"I'm Marian Lash," she whispered back. "I'm in an awful jam. I remember you, of course. I saw you watching me on the Avenue this morning. I liked your face. I almost stopped, on an impulse, to ask you to help me. But you were a stranger—"

"I sensed the impulse," said Daly. "I followed you. That explains everything. What do we do now, and what's the jam you're in, if you care to tell me? Before you answer, though, I liked your face, too. Whatever it is, I'm with you through hell and high water."

"I wonder, after I've told you. Does the name Lash mean anything to you?"

"Not much. I've heard the name, of course. There's an admiral in the office of Naval Operations by that name—"

"He's my father! I'm a little thief, Jack Daly! I stole the designs from father's office, of the navy's newest flying fortress! It's a plane that can cross the continent in eight hours—"

"And you stole the designs, from your own father?"

"Yes. If I hadn't, my father would have been . . . would have been kill—"

She hesitated. She was leaning against him, trembling. He wondered if he dared put his arm about her shoulders, decided against it, while he mulled the whole thing over, wondering just what he should believe, how far he should trust this girl who confessed herself a thief.

"Hold me," she said, "or I'll pass out. Sorry to be such a sissy, but—"

He held her. It was nice, even under the circumstances.

"My father would have been killed!" she went on. "For the designs. I got wind of it at an embassy ball—"

"*What* embassy?"

SHE hesitated, then told him. He gasped in consternation, for she named the embassy of a nation generally regarded as Uncle Sam's closest friend. She'd felt faint, she said, and had gone into a dark room to lie down. Several men had come in. One turned on a light. She had been lying behind a screen of wraps flung over the backs of chairs, and they hadn't seen her. They said just enough to terrify her, make her cry out, before they discovered her. Then, the ultimatum. She'd heard too much.

She was, they said, the perfect instrument for their plans. *She,* Marian Lash, could save them a lot of trouble by getting the flying-fortress design. If she didn't, her father might stop a bullet at almost any time—while walking along the street, going to or coming from his office, or riding in an official car. And who would ever discover who had done it? In the regular course of events they didn't resort to murder; but they would, this time, they had told her, if she failed to get those designs.

"So, I went to father's office this morning and stole them!" she finished.

"Where are they now?"

"That," she said, "is what they're trying to make me tell! I've said, so far, that I won't give them up until I can dictate terms. That if anything happens to my father, I'll *never* produce them, no matter what they do to me. It's simply stalemate, unless they torture it out of me, which they never will—"

She got no farther.

The door banged open. The lights went on. The four hard-faced men came in.

With them was a fifth man, a small gray man, with the eyes of a hawk. There were welts on his face. He staggered a little as he crossed the threshold.

Marian Lash ran to him, crying out: "Dad! Dad, they promised me they wouldn't until I—"

"You were a little fool," said Admiral Lash grimly, "to grab those designs. But it runs in the family, that kind of foolishness. Now they've got me here to use against you. They gave me the whole picture, on the way here. They're pretty tough, these fellows. But no tougher than the Lashes. Promise me one thing, honey? If they start working on me, you're to tell them nothing, understand? Not even if they take me apart! Those designs represent everything I do! They're my responsibility—"

The chauffeur knocked Admiral Lash halfway across the room. Marian cried out again, started toward her father.

Green Eyes slapped her, almost knocking her over. Daly stepped forward. Two of the men whirled on him. Their faces were grim as death.

"Take it easy, dick," said Green Eyes. "You must realize that we know what we're doing, are sure of ourselves, or we wouldn't let our faces be seen like this. We get those designs, somehow or other, then hop a plane and fly out to sea—"

"Where one of your nation's ships is waiting!"

"You catch on fast! Now, gentlemen . . . and you, Marian . . . we intend to get that set of plans. Marian knows where it is. We'll get it out of her if we can . . . by slugging her old man silly. In all probability she passed it on to this young man of hers . . . so we can work on him. We have three chances of getting what we're after . . . and messengers to run errands, like going for the designs when we find out where they are. Well, who talks first? Admiral?"

CHAPTER III.

OFFICE DATE.

"GO to hell!" said Admiral Lash. His mouth was smeared with blood. Daly looked at the gray-eyed man and knew instantly how he had managed to become an admiral in Uncle

Sam's navy. There was no scare in him.

"Marian!" said Green Eyes, silk in his voice. "Do you tell us, or do we start socking the old man?"

"Sock until hell freezes over," said Lash. "And if Marian tells, I'll kick her into the street!"

"But, admiral," said Green Eyes softly, "would you advise her to tell to keep *herself* from being hammered to a pulp?"

Admiral Lash wet his lips. Daly could see the turmoil raging behind those gray eyes. If the designs were lost, through his daughter, their honor was lost with them. On the other hand, to have that beautiful girl hammered until her face was an ugly red mess— It was a tough decision for a father to make.

"Let them alone," said Daly, quietly. "Neither one of them knows where the designs are!"

Green Eyes whirled on Jack Daly. "What's that?" he said. "Say that again!"

"Neither one knows. Marian gave the designs to me before you cornered her this morning. She gave them to me in my office. I put them away . . . in a safe . . . with a time lock on it! It won't open until nine o'clock in the morning!"

Marian Lash was looking at Daly strangely. So was Admiral Lash. Both were puzzled. Marian smoothed out her face, taking her cue from Daly. Green Eyes whirled on her.

"Is that true?"

"No! No! I didn't give him anything! I never saw him before you brought him here, except on the street. He tried to pick me up, that's all, and followed me, to see you force me into your car—"

"Naturally," said Daly, softly, "Marian doesn't wish to get me into trouble. She doesn't want me to get beaten up or killed—"

"I've got his papers," said Green Eyes to the chauffeur. "An address is given. Go to this place and see what you can find out—"

"I've moved," said Daly calmly, "to Pennsylvania Avenue . . . but I guess I won't tell you the number! After all, my safe isn't big, and you could bring it away."

Green Eyes approached Daly.

"Where," he said, "is this office of yours?"

"In the words of Admiral Lash, which I couldn't improve on to save my life . . . go to hell, gentlemen!"

DALY started to get set for the inevitable slugging; but it started before he could. It was a grim business.

Admiral Lash started to take a hand, but he wasn't as young as he had once been; and Green Eyes floored him with a right to the jaw. Marian rushed to her supine father, cradled his head in her lap and tried to keep from crying. Daly, his brain working at top speed, had the fight all to himself.

Fists hammered at his face, head, his stomach. Every blow that landed hurt him from heels to crown. When he was bleeding like a stuck pig, they drew back from him.

"Where is this office of yours, Daly?" said Green Eyes.

"I will take you there, gentlemen," said Daly through smashed and bleeding lips, "at nine o'clock tomorrow morning!"

"You'll *tell* us where it is now, or get hammered to death!"

"If I'm dead, who'll tell you where the office is?"

"Marian Lash. You said she gave the papers to you there, didn't you?"

"Yes, but at the office from which I moved! She doesn't know the address of my new office!"

"We can't wait until nine o'clock tomorrow morning. We intend to find out before midnight, or take you apart. That gives us two hours in which to work on you."

"I tell you," said Marian Lash, "this man is lying! He's never even seen the designs! He's merely a romantic fool who tried to pick me up and got himself in this jam. He won't tell you where his office is, or the designs, because he doesn't know where the designs are, and, for all I know, hasn't even *got* an office!"

Admiral Lash had sat up again, shaking his head. He looked around as his daughter spoke, and his eyes locked with those of Jack Daly.

Daly was trying to put appeal in his eyes. He didn't want to see Lash get hammered any more, and every threat directed at Marian—which he knew the agents would carry out without a qualm of conscience—made his flesh crawl. Lash's eyes widened.

They never left Daly's, as Lash said:

"It's no use, Marian. They know you're simply trying to protect your boy-friend. Let him play his own game. If you don't know where the designs are, say so! Personally, I don't mind the young brat taking a beating in my place. He's younger, and can take it!"

Daly's heart jumped into his throat. Admiral Lash was no fool, had picked up his cue perfectly. Question was, could Daly himself stand what he knew was coming? He *had* to! Between Lash and himself, they had explained Marian's desire to keep Daly from getting hurt.

"Your father is right, darling," said Daly quietly to Marian, whose eyes widened until they almost popped out at the term of endearment, "though I hate to admit it. But for the fact that he's your father, I wouldn't mind seeing him get his guts kicked out. I can't say that he's ever looked with much favor on *me.*"

"My daughter," said Lash grimly, "is going to marry a naval officer. You might as well get that through your head first as last. And whatever happens here isn't going to make any difference, either, young man!"

THE foreign agents looked puzzled. Green Eyes was in command. He looked from one to the other of his captives.

"What's this lug's name, admiral?" he said.

Daly shut his mouth on a gasp. Lash didn't know!

"His *right* name," said Lash calmly, getting to his feet shakily, "is Martin Lake. I bilged him out when I was commanding the naval academy!"

The old boy was good, Daly thought—and he'd expect Daly to be good in whatever followed. Obviously, he expected everybody to be good who worked with or for him. A martinet, but a fair-minded one.

"You bilged me to get me away from Marian," said Daly, "and not because I wasn't officer material. If that was a square thing to do—"

"All of which," said Green Eyes, "adds up to about ten minutes of stalling. I think, for all hands! Lash knows his daughter; his daughter knows her father. That's all we can be sure of. For the rest of it . . . Daly, for the last time, where are those designs?"

"My office," said Daly. "I'll take you there at nine in the morning!"

"What's the name of your agency?"

"S R O, but it isn't in the telephone book. I just took over this morning!"

"Spill, or we work on all three of you until someone cracks!"

"Just one condition," said Daly calmly. "If you touch either the admiral or his daughter again, I swear to God that you can kill me before I'll give you any information about anything!"

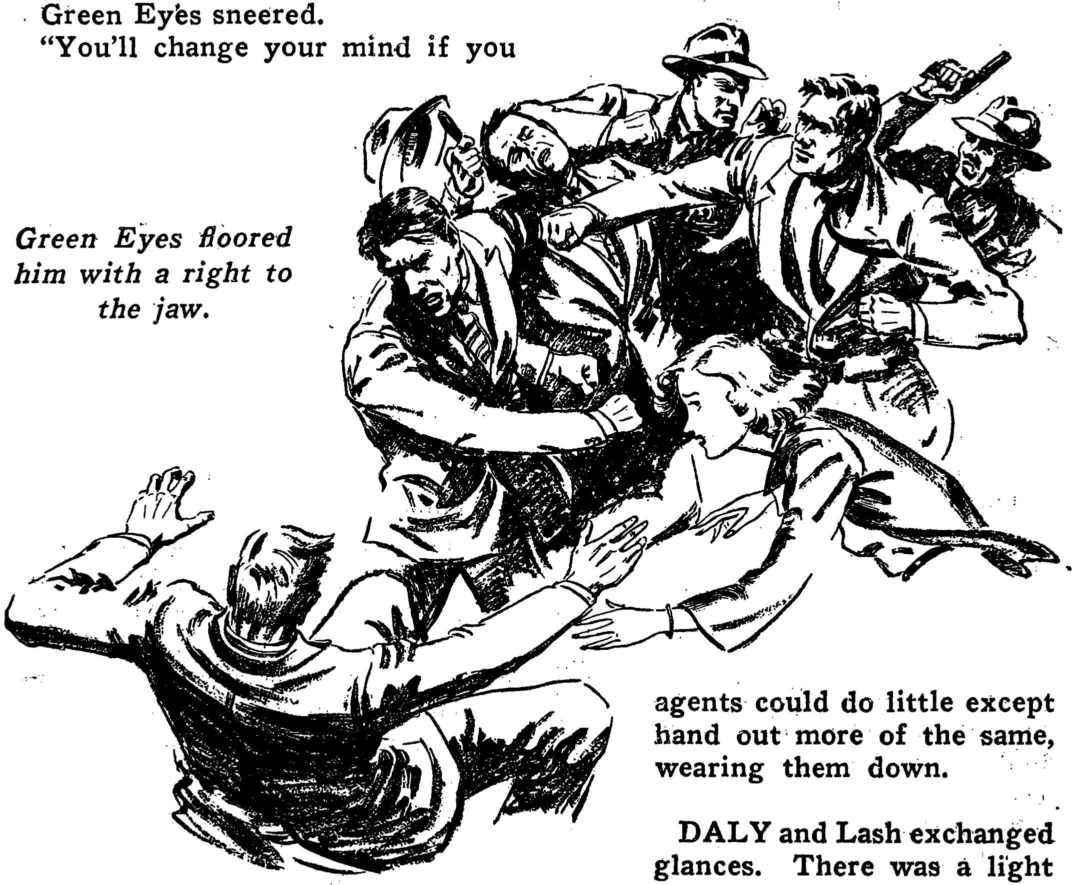
Green Eyes sneered.

"You'll change your mind if you love Marian, I think, and we start working on her! You know what we can do!"

Daly looked at Marian Lash, then at the admiral.

Their faces were grim, determined. There was no help for it. All three had to take whatever was coming, until the end, whatever it was, with what courage they could muster. He saw in Marian's face that she would never tell. The admiral couldn't, because he didn't know. Daly didn't know, either. He could at least keep them from knowing that he didn't know!

No three people, Daly thought numbly, when it was all over, had ever gone through so much together. All three had tasted to the full the ruthlessness of the foreign agents. Without killing them, those agents could do little except hand out more of the same, wearing them down.



Green Eyes floored him with a right to the jaw.

DALY and Lash exchanged glances. There was a light of battle in Lash's eyes. Daly grinned at him, and the grin started his lips bleeding again.

Daly flung himself at Green Eyes. Lash hurled himself forward, too. Marian ran toward the window, yelling, and the chauffeur felled her with a right to the chin. As she went down, her legs going rubbery, Daly prayed that her neck wasn't broken—

and that if it wasn't she'd stay unconscious as long as possible.

He and Lash were in for it. Lash, for a man well past middle age, did very well. He got in some pretty good wallops before he was downed again.

The foreign agents were methodical, cruel, savage. They used gun muzzles, fists, the tops of their heads. They were obviously accustomed to beating their wishes out of their antagonists.

Daly, as he reeled before their concerted attack, understood that they were being careful not to knock him out. There were times without number when he was all but knocked out, yet did not lose consciousness. His brain reeled. His stomach turned with nausea. His enemies watched his face, reading its every expression—then one or the other of them drove a fist or a foot into the pit of his stomach. There was little he could do but endure it.

Lash went down time after time, before he was hit a little too hard, and was out for a long time. It was merciful, Daly knew, and he wished that he, too, might go down. The beating continued until Daly almost cried out.

Then, Green Eyes, scarcely breathing hard, said:

"How about it now? Ready to talk?"

Daly's mouth was a mess. The fact that it was gave him an idea. He mumbled and spluttered, trying to give the impression, as long as possible, that he couldn't form words. The chauffeur and another man slammed him into a corner, and he sat down, his legs spreading as they slid along the floor.

"Write," said Green Eyes, "if you can't talk."

Daly fumbled with the paper and pencil that were shoved at him. His knuckles were swollen to furnish all the excuse he needed. But that stall

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couldn't last forever, either. So he wrote:

"The answer is *still* go to hell!"

IT was all Daly after that, for the admiral had taken too much. He was too old for it. The agents cursed when they could do nothing with the old man, who mumbled vacantly. Marian came to several times, but fainted when they tried to torture information out of her. The agents had overreached themselves with their cruelty.

Only Daly was left, and he was resolved to stick it out until hell froze over. How he did, he was never afterward quite sure. It was agony without end, agony that finally numbed beyond all feeling. And always they just kept him from fainting with pain.

And then, somehow, the night had passed, and his antagonists looked worn, too. There was some satisfaction in the proof, on their faces, that he, too, had done some damage.

"Well," said Green Eyes, "you've won so far. Now we'll go to your office."

"At nine o'clock," said Daly, his words almost incomprehensible because his mouth was so bruised. But his heart was singing. He had fought a good fight. Lash and his daughter had escaped comparatively whole.

"All right," said Green Eyes, wearily. "We'll take all of you. Understand that you can't get away with a thing! We'll all keep together. Then you'll all go with us to the plane, and stay there until we've taken off—"

"Yes," said Daly, "I expected that."

Lash was still dazed, but the light of battle was in his eyes again. Marian looked like a ghost when they all went downstairs, finally, and into the car which had first picked up Marian.

There were gats against the sides of all three. The chauffeur kept Lash in the front seat, drove with one hand, held a gat against the admiral with the other. Marian and Daly occupied jump-seats, with the other three men behind them.

"Pennsylvania Avenue and Sixth Street," mumbled Daly.

"Remember," said Green Eyes, "no monkey business, or you'll get it! We'll be caught; but if we're caught now, anyhow, after misusing an admiral—"

Daly pulled his puffed lids back from his eyes as the car pulled slowly up to Pennsylvania Avenue and Sixth Street. He saw, parked near the right place, the familiar cab. He smiled slightly. Trust a cabby to be on hand for his money and tip! Now, if the fellow had used his head—

The car pulled up to the curb, almost behind the cab. If Green Eyes remembered the cab from yesterday, he gave no sign. People were prone to forget things, Daly knew.

"Out," said Green Eyes. "All together!"

They piled out. Lash, his daughter, Daly, the agents. They started across the sidewalk—when three men stepped out of the cab. They held Tommy guns. Their faces were grim. They closed in on Green Eyes.

"Hold it, gents!" said a sergeant. "These guns make a mess when they let go!"

SLOWLY, the agents raised their hands.

But Daly was not fooled. He grabbed Marian Lash, flung her to the sidewalk. He kicked the admiral in the stomach, and Marian's father went down, sitting on the pavement.

Daly sprawled over Marian just

as the agents went into action. Their lifting of hands had been a ruse. Those hands were suddenly filled with gats, and the gats were flaming. Green Eyes got in the first shot, and one of the coppers went down.

The agents were quite cold about it. Green Eyes spoke to his men, his voice deadly serious.

"Kill or be killed! No halfway measures!"

The Tommies started chattering. One of the agents went back, grabbing at his stomach, but still firing his gats, as though he couldn't keep his fingers from working.

But his bullets ricocheted off the sidewalk. Green Eyes was firing steadily, coldly. Daly could hear slugs hit human flesh. The street was cleared, because people heard, and ducked for cover.

Daly, as the agents paid no heed to Marian, her father or himself, whirled away from Marian, flung himself at the knees of Green Eyes. He wanted to know more about the man, take him alive.

But even as he struck the man's knees, they buckled—and blood from holes in him made by a Tommy dripped on the back of Daly's neck. Then Green Eyes toppled on Daly, dead.

The Tommy guns chattered for a little bit longer. Then came a sudden, appalling silence.

Admiral Lash was the first to break it. He staggered up, his face white, but his eyes popping with pleasure. He gathered up his daughter, spoke to Daly—who stood looking down at the net result of his first case as a sidewalk detective.

"Come to naval operations, this afternoon—" said Lash.

Daly nodded absently, while the coppers started their routine stuff with the dead agents, and sent their own man away in an ambulance with a screaming siren.

The cabby, grinning, came up to Daly.

"I did my best, sir," he said. "Now how about my dough?"

Daly gasped. He *still* had no money. He explained to the cabby. There was the appointment with Admiral Lash— He'd probably be rewarded. Though seeing Lash's daughter again would be reward enough!

The cab driver stared around, indicating the street corner. "This is some office, I'll say," he grinned. "I kinda figured you didn't own as much as a chair. So that's why I brought the law along."

Daly looked grateful.

"Boy, if you hadn't!" he finished.

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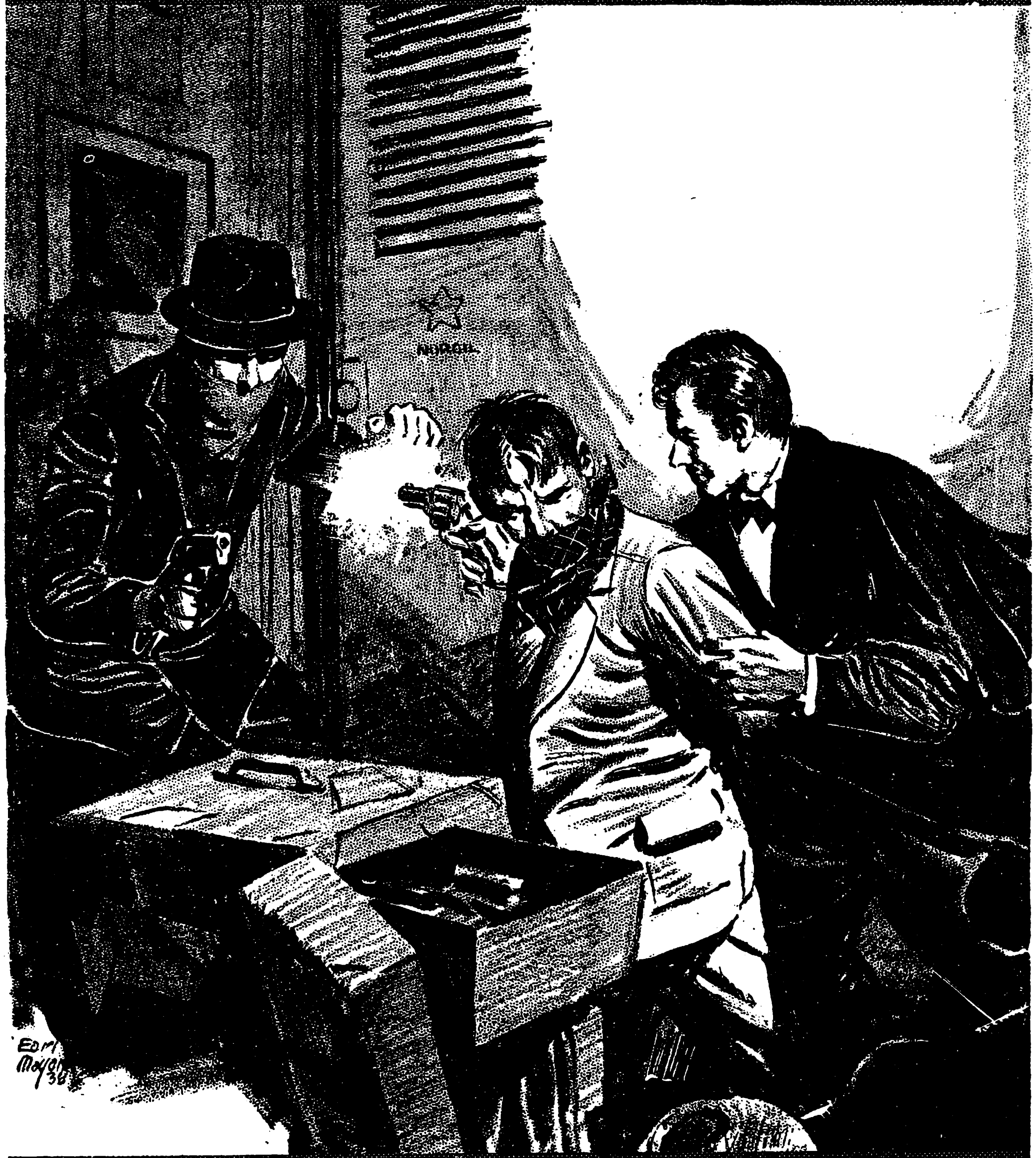
BUT FOR NORGIL IT TURNED OUT TO BE

OLD CRIME WEEK


NORGIL
Earl Mayan 38

BY MAXWELL GRANT

WELL-KNOWN AUTHOR OF THE SHADOW NOVELS

Old Crime Week

CHAPTER I.

NORGIL COMES HOME.

IT was Old Home Week in Westbury, and big banners stretched everywhere along the streets, welcoming the native sons who were returning to the town of their birth.

Plastered upon other walls were bill posters that carried the name and picture of Norgil the Magician, who was to appear in person at the Star Theater, as the main attraction during this week of celebration.

Norgil compared banners and posters as he rode from the railway station to the theater. A smile flickered upon the suave lips beneath the magician's pointed mustache.

What a tie-up it would be if Norgil could announce that he, the visiting celebrity, was one of the home-comers!

Perhaps Norgil would make that very announcement before this week was ended. For the present, however, he preferred to be regarded as a stranger. Therefore he repressed his smile and nodded blandly as the man beside him pointed out the sights of Westbury.

Norgil's companion was Morton Rowden, prominent local business man. Portly, middle-aged, with smooth and roundish features, Rowden represented the conservatism that long had ruled Westbury. Among others of his class, however, Rowden was known as a go-getter.

It was Rowden, who, as chairman of the Home Week Committee, had struck upon the happy idea of reopening the old Star Theater and engaging Norgil as the feature performer.

When Rowden's car stopped in the street behind the theater, Norgil said to Rowden:

"I'll be in my dressing room. Come on back after you've finished your business in the front office. If you see that new secretary of mine, Judreck, send him along. Tell him to bring any mail."

Entering the stage door, Norgil found the place deserted. It was late afternoon; his assistants, finished with the unpacking, had evidently gone out to eat.

Norgil opened a door which bore a star and stepped into the dusk-filled dressing room. From that moment, he no longer lacked a welcome in his home town—but it wasn't the sort of greeting that he had expected.

THE welcome came from two chunky men who popped from darkened corners of the room, to prod Norgil with revolver muzzles. One growled:

"This is a stick-up! Stretch!"

As he obliged, Norgil tried to make out their faces. He couldn't, for they wore bandanna masks. One kept the magician covered, while the other frisked him. Finding Norgil's keys, the fellow proceeded to unlock a large wardrobe trunk that stood in the corner.

Norgil's thoughts leaped ahead. His eyes, shifting occasionally, kept tally on the search. He was waiting until the crook reached the third drawer in the trunk. When his gaze changed, Norgil noted the dressing-room door. It was ajar; a mere rap would swing it inward. Norgil was hoping that the drawer would be opened first, the door soon afterward.

Events came as he calculated. The moment that the searching crook pulled the third drawer, Norgil whipped away from the thug who covered him. Before the trigger man could shoot, the magician was locked with the searcher by the trunk. Out of that grapple came a hand that gripped a gun.

The fist was Norgil's; the gun, his stage revolver that he had deftly snatched from its proper corner in the drawer!

As Norgil aimed for the gunner, he heard the expected rap. The door was swinging. Against the light beyond it, Norgil saw a startled face, its mouth wide open, eyes goggly as they stared through large-lensed glasses. But the arrival, despite his paleness, proved game.

"Get him, Judreck!" yelled Norgil. "The fellow with the gun!"

The secretary dived as the gunner wheeled. Norgil didn't give the crook a chance to fire. The magician's revolver was talking; its roar spurred the gunman to flight.

He didn't guess that the shots were blanks as he wildly yanked himself away from Judreck's tackle and stumbled out through the door. Nor did the crook that Norgil gripped. He thought that the magician had dropped his pal. With a wild, frantic howl, he too broke away and made for the door.

Judreck tried to trip the second crook, but missed and lost his balance. Sprawling headlong, he went beneath Norgil's flying feet, tripping the magician as he started to give chase.

By the time Norgil was up again, both crooks were clattering toward the stage door, beyond reach of the blows that he had intended to give them with his gun.

Norgil kept up the pursuit, spicing it with a few blank shots that might have caused one crook or the other to give up hope of flight. It happened that their avenue of escape was too close. Instead of running out by the alley, they cut through a space between two buildings.

Halting in the dusk, Norgil heard the roar of a motor starting from a parking lot. Turning about, he came back to the stage door to find Judreck blinking through his dislodged spectacles. Before Norgil could congratulate the secretary upon his prompt assistance, lights came on backstage.

For a moment, Norgil tightened his grip upon his gun, then thrust the weapon in his pocket. More men had arrived, attracted by the shots, but Norgil received them as friends, not enemies. They had come through from the box office, headed by Morton Rowden.

CHAPTER II.

CRIME'S PURPOSE.

BY the time Norgil had returned to his dressing room, newspaper reporters were on hand. There was one question that they wanted answered.

What had crooks expected to find in Norgil's trunk that would make it worth while for them to stage so bold a raid?

Norgil could have answered that question; but he preferred to dodge it. Seated at his dressing table, he began to open mail that Judreck had brought from the theater office. At intervals he smiled at the reporters, told them to wait awhile.

Getting no satisfaction from Norgil, the newshawks pestered Judreck. The secretary kept shaking his head in perplexed fashion, then suddenly had a bright idea. Turning to Norgil, he exclaimed:

"Perhaps they had heard about the Maximilian Medal!"

Right then, Norgil would gladly have doubled Judreck's salary. It *wasn't* the Maximilian Medal that crooks had come after. But the medal was the very sort of thing that would impress the reporters.

Reaching to the unlocked trunk, Norgil fished in the vest pocket of his dress suit and brought out a gold medallion the size of a silver dollar. Deftly, he flipped it along the knuckles of his right hand, letting each finger somersault it farther. Bringing the medal back with his thumb, Norgil repeated the dextrous roll and handed the object to the reporters.

"A unique curio," Norgil told them suavely, "and therefore very valuable. That medal was struck off in honor of the Emperor Maximilian at the very hour of his execution.

"With me, it has proven a good-luck piece. I always carry it in my pocket when I give a show. Probably Judreck is right. Those crooks heard about this valuable talisman, and came to steal it."

The reporters wanted to know more about the medal, so Judreck obligingly supplied them with press clippings that gave the whole story. But when the reporters had gone, Norgil withheld the congratulations that he intended to confer upon Judreck.

A BLUNT-NOSED, long-jawed man had entered the dressing room and was talking to Morton Rowden. The fellow was wearing a derby hat, and one hand, hunched to his hip, drew his coat back far enough to display a badge. The newcomer looked like a headquarters dick, and the expression on his flattish face told that he hadn't been impressed by the history of the Maximilian Medal.

"This is Detective Delaney," introduced Rowden, his tone somewhat worried. "Tim Delaney, the best man on the force. I've been telling him about what happened here—"

"And it's pretty thin baloney," interjected Delaney.

Norgil eyed the detective coolly, then passed him the gold medallion.

"Look it over," said Norgil. "My story still stands."

Delaney glared sourly. He studied the medal, then tossed it on the dressing table.

"Bring it along," he told Norgil, "and your gun, too. We'll show them both to Chief Cartwright. We've got a law in this town regarding firearms, and you'll need a license for that revolver you use in your show."

Delaney stalked from the dressing room. Rowden went along, trying to soothe him. Judreck began to stammer apologies, but Norgil stopped him with a smile.

"Go on out," he told the secretary. "Don't let that chap worry you. We'll settle everything with the police chief."

Norgil went through the rest of his mail. Among the envelopes he found one that interested him. He opened it, read the note that it contained. Crumpling the paper, he thrust it in his pocket and looked up to find that he wasn't alone.

Miriam Laymond was watching him.

Of all the members of Norgil's troupe, Miriam was the one most in the magician's confidence. She had arrived, unnoticed by Norgil, in time to hear Delaney's comments. As Norgil glanced in her direction, he knew that this was one of those rare occasions upon which Miriam was really worried.

Norgil smiled; but Miriam didn't respond. There was a tremble of her lips that added to her natural beauty. Her eyes were large, so serious that they seemed unusually lovely. The brunette stepped closer and placed her hand upon Norgil's arm.

"Tell me"—the girl's whisper was a plea—"why did they really come here—those crooks?"

"You heard what I told Delaney."

"But I don't believe it." Miriam was emphatic. "You haven't used that medal story in months. I was even surprised when Judreck knew about it. He hasn't been with the show long."

Norgil gave a nod.

"It was something else," he admitted. "I'll tell you the whole story later. Meanwhile, I want you to call my lawyer."

"Your lawyer?"

"Yes. I have one here in Westbury. His name is Hervey Grimm. You will find his number listed in the phone book."

"And you want him to come to police headquarters?"

The breathless manner of Miriam's query was proof of the girl's real worriment. Norgil's response was one of positive reassurance.

"Not at all," said the magician. "I want him to stay away. Just tell Grimm that everything is all right; that I will meet him after the show tonight."

Miriam nodded. There was something else that she wanted to say, but she managed to restrain it. Noting her expression, Norgil guessed the unspoken question and answered it.

"I'll meet you in an hour," he told the girl. "We'll have dinner at the hotel. Then you will hear the inside story."

With that, Norgil was gone.

CHAPTER III.

PAST AND FUTURE.

THE visit to police headquarters proved a triumph for Norgil. With Rowden arguing his cause, and Judreck backing up the testimony, the magician had no trouble convincing Chief Cartwright of the attack by the thugs.

Fingering the Maximilian Medal, the police chief decided that such a rare curio would be valuable enough to attract thieves. He rebuked Detective Delaney.

Though the firearms law was strict in Westbury, the police chief decided that Norgil had been justified in using his gun, particularly since it had been loaded with blank cartridges. To assure the magician no further trouble, Chief Cartwright registered the revolver and gave Norgil a permit to carry it.

Riding back to the theater in Rowden's car, Norgil and the portly promoter chuckled over the setback that Detective Delaney had received. Even Judreck, usually serious, smiled.

In his dressing room, Norgil put the medal and the revolver in pockets of his evening clothes. Members of the company had arrived backstage, so there was little chance that crooks would make another foray. Nevertheless, Norgil warned Judreck to lock both the trunk and dressing room, should the secretary go to the front office.

Leaving Judreck busy at a typewriter, Norgil strolled to the hotel to keep his dinner engagement with Miriam. At the hotel entrance, he found Tim Delaney waiting for him. The blunt-faced detective gruffed some apologies, then explained why he had come to find the magician.

"The chief told me to make a round of the joints," said the dick, "to see if I could spot those mobbies who barged in on you. How about coming along to identify them?"

Norgil reminded Delaney that the pair had worn masks; that, therefore, he couldn't help.

Delaney didn't agree. His wise

grin denoted a return of his suspicions. Norgil settled that matter very convincingly.

"Go over to the theater," he told Delaney, "and pick up Judreck. He was in on the battle, too, so he will do as well as I would."

With Delaney gone, Norgil entered the hotel, to find Miriam waiting in the lobby. As they walked to the dining room, Norgil asked her if she had called the lawyer, Grimm.

Miriam nodded, then said:

"He wasn't there when I phoned, so I went to his office. When Grimm came in, I gave him your message."

Something in Miriam's tone told Norgil that Miriam had not liked Hervey Grimm. He questioned her on that subject when they were seated at a table by a corner window.

"Perhaps Grimm is all right," conceded Miriam, "but still I don't like him. He reminded me of a fox."

"That's what I need here in Westbury," said Norgil, "a fox. Grimm fills the bill. Look."

He pointed from the window, indicated something. It was a gold-lettered sign above a gray stone building, and it read:

LORING, CRAYDE & CO.
INVESTMENT BANKERS

There was a reflective look in Norgil's gaze, an expression so fraught with memory that Miriam watched his eyes. She scarcely saw his lips move as he spoke.

"The founder of that company," said Norgil softly, "was Foster Loring. He remained its president until it failed, a good many years ago. The company was reorganized by his partner, Amos Crayde.

"By that time, Foster Loring was dead. He had never recovered from the shock of that failure, for he had considered the company solvent at the time it crashed. And Foster Loring"—Norgil's eyes met Miriam's—"was my father."

Miriam was too amazed to speak. She saw Norgil gaze from the window; her own eyes went back to the sign. Those letters in the name Loring seemed to dance. Miriam could picture them rearranging themselves, to spell Norgil. For the first time she understood why the magician had chosen the stage name with which he had become famous.

NORGIL was speaking again; his tone, though low, was no longer soft. His words were sharp.

"I was absent from Westbury," he said, "and I never returned, until today. For years I have been gathering facts from many sources, to prove my father innocent in the failure that overtook his firm.

"The documents that I have gathered place the full blame upon Amos Crayde, the richest man in Westbury. Through my lawyer, Hervey Grimm, I have demanded that Crayde admit the truth, and make restitution to all persons whose investments were lost."

An instant thought struck Miriam.

"Those thieves at the theater!" she exclaimed. "They came to steal the evidence!"

"Probably," agreed Norgil, with a tight smile. "But Grimm has the documents. If Crayde made that thrust this afternoon, it was his last. He wants to talk to me."

Miriam remembered the note that Norgil had placed in his pocket before he left the dressing room. She saw Norgil rise from the table, his thoughts of dinner banished.

"I know you won't mind eating alone," said the magician. "I'm going to stay in my room here at the hotel in case Crayde shows up.

Grimm said it wouldn't hurt if I talked to the old swindler alone."

"Don't go easy with him," pleaded Miriam. "Remember—"

"I'll remember one thing," interposed Norgil. "If there is any man who deserves any punishment that I can possibly give, that man is Amos Crayde."

A waiter was approaching. Norgil glanced at his watch, casually reminded Miriam that there was only an hour and a half until show time. Then he was gone, and the girl, her dinner order taken, was staring from the window toward the gold-lettered sign that symbolized a strange, long-buried story.

CHAPTER IV.

MURDER DISCOVERED.

BY show time, Miriam had learned much regarding Amos Crayde, thanks to the curiosity that prompted her, and her ability at asking artful questions.

Crayde, it appeared, lived alone in a large mansion near the town's limits. He had servants, of course, but they were so overworked and underpaid that they had recently gone on strike. Crayde's only compromise had been to rehire them on a part-time basis.

Perhaps those servants weren't around tonight. If such were the case, thought Miriam, no one would know if Crayde stole out and came to visit Norgil.

The thought alarmed Miriam, particularly because Norgil hadn't reached the theater when the "fifteen-minute" call came. Miriam saw Judreck arrive, accompanied by Detective Delaney, who remained backstage while Judreck went to the front office to get some theater passes. Returning, the secretary went to Norgil's dressing room, then poked his head out to ask where the magician was.

"He hasn't come from the hotel yet," Miriam told him, while she tried to suppress the anxiety in her voice. "Perhaps you had better call him, Mr. Judreck."

Judreck began to nod, then exclaimed:

"Ah! There he is!"

Norgil had entered the stage door. Hurrying to the dressing room, he began to get ready for the show. Judreck, finding that he wasn't needed, announced that he was taking Delaney to a box to watch the show. The remark brought a smile through the make-up that Norgil was smearing on his face.

"Good enough," said the magician. "Delaney thought I was fooling him this afternoon. He'll be really fooled when he gets a look at the show tonight."

Norgil reached the wing at curtain call. Miriam had just time to whisper:

"Did you see Crayde?"

"No," undertoned Norgil. "The old buzzard didn't show up. But I'm going out to his house after the show, and so is Grimm. We'll settle this thing tonight."

All during the show, Miriam was uneasy. Time and again she nearly missed her cues. She was wondering why Crayde hadn't come to the hotel. It seemed like part of a plan, even though the rest puzzled her.

Crayde, from the way Miriam pictured the man, would be the sort who would pull some evil ruse. Perhaps Norgil was up against a master schemer who was ready to reverse the situation at the eleventh hour.

Tonight was a time when Norgil might need some real assistance, other than the sort that Miriam gave him on the stage. That repeated thought gave the girl an idea, which she finally planned to put in practice at the earliest moment.

As soon as the show ended, Miriam scudded to her dressing room. Still attired in the scanty, short-skirted costume that she wore in the finale, the girl flung a long coat over her shoulders and hurried out through the stage door. Norgil did not see her go.

There was a taxi at the next corner. Entering it, Miriam gave Crayde's address.

Alighting at the mansion, Miriam made her way along a hedge-fringed walk. The house was dark, except for a side window that opened on to a sun porch. Miriam decided that the porch would be an excellent vantage point from which to watch for Norgil's arrival.

Soon, the brunette was peering over the window ledge. The window itself was open, which made it all the better. The room that Miriam saw was a lighted study, with a big desk in the corner. Behind the desk was a swivel chair, tilted back at a steep angle as though it had a broken spring. Miriam wondered about that, until she saw a sight that really startled her.

Poked from beside the desk was a scrawny hand, its fingers bent like withered claws!

MIRIAM gasped. Then, bravely, she swung across the window sill into the room itself. On tiptoe, she approached the desk and peered beyond it. She saw more than the hand; she saw the body, half slid from the swivel chair.

She saw a face, dry like parchment, with drawn lips beneath its thin, hooked nose. There were eyes, glassy in death; a stiff shirt front, stained with blood. The dead man could be one person only: Amos Crayde. The wound was obviously the result of a revolver bullet; and from the dryish glisten of the blood, Miriam knew that Crayde must have died an hour or more before her arrival.

There was a sheet of paper on the desk, under the telephone. Tightening, Miriam read its carbon-printed lines. It was a duplicate of a letter that Crayde had sent to Norgil, but it said nothing of a meeting at the hotel. Instead, it stated that Crayde would expect Norgil here after the show.

Then Miriam's eyes were riveted by something that lay on the floor almost beneath Crayde's body. She didn't have to stoop to touch the object; she could make it out plainly by the light from the desk lamp. It was something that she had seen often before—a rounded object of gold.

The Maximilian Medal!

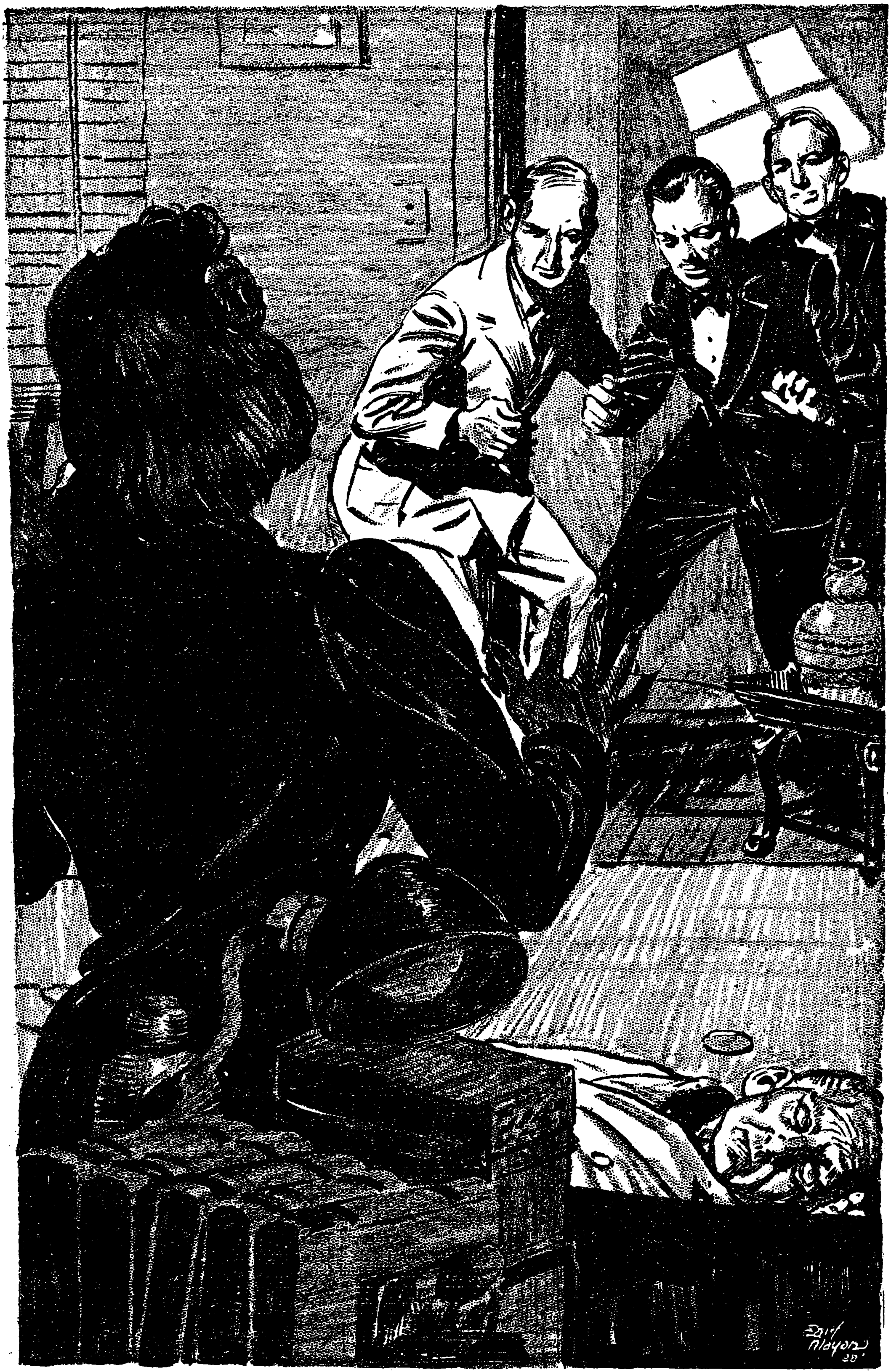
Mechanically, Miriam found herself picking up the telephone. She called the hotel, asked for Norgil's room, hoping that he had stopped off there.

Norgil's voice came briskly across the wire; it gave Miriam a sudden thrill of reassurance.

Finding her own voice, the girl began to detail her discovery. She had just finished with the news when a chance sound caused her to clamp the receiver on the hook and make a quick dash for the window. Her move came too late.

The sound had been the opening of the door. Miriam was spied by an entering man, who also saw Crayde's body from his vantage angle. The man gave a sharp cry that made Miriam turn. She saw a face that she recognized—the pointed nose, and foxlike features of Norgil's lawyer, Hervey Grimm!

The attorney wasn't alone. Behind him were two men who looked



The sound had been the opening of the door.

like servants. They bounded forward at Grimm's shout, grabbed Miriam as she tried to dive out through the window. Squirming from her coat, Miriam managed an instant's freedom.

Then hands were ripping at her scanty stage attire, clutching silk that tore, until Grimm, plunging into the fray, seized Miriam bodily and clamped a hand across her mouth to silence her screams.

Half smothered, Miriam sagged limply into the arms of her captors.

CHAPTER V.

NORGIL'S RIDE.

SLOWLY pacing his hotel room, Norgil was pondering upon the facts that Miriam had given him. His smile was bitter as he recalled Delaney's talk of a "framed" stick-up earlier in the day. Here was a frame-up that worked exactly opposite.

During the hour that Norgil had stayed in his hotel room, expecting Crayde, someone had taken the stage revolver and gold medallion from the dressing room. At Crayde's, a murderer had slain the old man with the gun and had left the medal on the scene.

The gun must have been replaced in the dressing room later, for Norgil had used it in the show. As for the medal, he had supposed it to be deep in his vest pocket, where he always kept it but seldom bothered to look for it.

As for the letter that Miriam had mentioned, it added to the plot. Norgil hadn't received such a letter from Crayde. Probably the letter had been purloined; and in all probability, it had later been added to Norgil's files in his dressing room.

The whole game was to make Norgil appear to be Crayde's murderer. Should Grimm produce the evidence that revealed Crayde's past, it would serve to show that Norgil had every reason to want Crayde's death.

It was fortunate that Norgil hadn't learned the reason why Miriam had suddenly cut off the phone call. Otherwise, his alarm regarding the girl would have prevented him from thinking clearly. As it was, Norgil was piecing together the details of planted crime, and they all added up to a definite total. That total was Judreck.

Assuming that the stick-up at the theater had been faked—not by Norgil, but by Judreck—it would have given the secretary the chance to mention the Maximilian Medal, which Judreck had artfully done. Trusted by Norgil, Judreck could easily have taken the gun, the medal and the letter, then replaced the last two.

As for the brief note that Norgil had received from Crayde, mentioning a meeting at the hotel, Judreck could easily have faked it, for the note was unsigned.

But Judreck could not be the murderer!

He was a tool who had planned a simple alibi. Ironically enough, Norgil had helped Judreck's cause by giving him a better one. By Norgil's own order, Judreck had gone along with Detective Delaney and had later seen the show with him.

Except for the short intervals wherein Judreck had maneuvered his dirty work, the treacherous secretary had not been out of Delaney's sight. Certainly the detective could vouch for the fact that Judreck could not have made a trip to Crayde's house and committed the murder.

Norgil picked up the telephone. He put in a call to Grimm's residence, only to learn that the lawyer wasn't there. He was on the point of calling Morton Rowden, when he remembered that the promoter had gone out with members of the Home Week Committee. Out of a sudden whirl of thoughts, Norgil suddenly realized that an entirely different person was the one that he really ought to see.

Norgil was thinking of Tim Delaney. The star detective was the man to hear Norgil's story, before he listened to any other version involving Crayde's death.

HEADING for the hotel lobby, Norgil was wondering where he would find Delaney. He didn't have to wonder long.

Just as he stepped through the revolving door, a hand clamped his wrist. Norgil met sharp eyes peering from Delaney's blunt face, saw the dick's hand deep in a coat pocket.

"You're coming quietly," growled Delaney. "I'll make it easier for you, since you saved me the trouble of coming up after you."

"For what?" inquired Norgil coolly.

"For murder!" returned Delaney. "They found Crayde's body and the evidence. When they phoned the theater, I sent Judreck out there. We happened to be backstage when the call came."

There was a taxi parked at the curb, but its driver was absent. Delaney shoved Norgil into the cab. Pulling out his stubby revolver, the detective kept the magician covered from the door. One foot on the step, Delaney gave a shrill whistle to bring the taxi driver from a lunchroom.

"Listen, Delaney," began Norgil, "let's talk this over. If you'll listen to what I've got to say—"

"I've listened to too much of your hokum," interrupted the dick. "From now on I do the talking, until I get you to headquarters."

The driver arrived. Delaney didn't have to flash his badge, for the fellow recognized him. Shoving himself into the cab, the detective ordered the cabman to drive to police headquarters. Norgil had subsided; the driver didn't notice that anyone was in the cab except Delaney.

A desperate idea came to Norgil—one that was so wild that it seemed almost hopeless, yet the promise that it carried was immense. Here, in the next few minutes, he would have his chance to counteract the scheme that had enmeshed him. Delaney wouldn't have to listen to Norgil's story—not just yet!

With a sudden shift, Norgil pounced for the detective. It was his hand, this time, that grabbed a waiting wrist. Under the sudden grip, Delaney's gun was forced away from Norgil's ribs, while the magician's other fist clipped hard for the detective's jaw.

The taxi driver heard the fierce scuffle that followed. Peering back, he saw bodies flaying in the cab. One man slumped.

It was Delaney, though the driver didn't see the detective's face. An instant later there was a muffled gunshot from close to the floor.

The driver jammed on the brakes. Norgil's face came through the window, his elbow across it, so the driver would not recognize him. In his free hand Norgil had Delaney's gun. He poked the muzzle against the man's neck.

"Get going, mug," growled the magician, "unless you want me to croak you like I did that cluck Delaney!"

The driver leaped from the cab. Norgil opened the door, and spurred the man's flight with shots from the revolver. When the cabby had disappeared into an alleyway, Norgil took the wheel, started the cab in motion.

Twisting through streets that he remembered from his boyhood days, the magician was off upon an elusive journey in the captured cab, with the prone and silent figure of Detective Delaney rolling upon the floor.

CHAPTER VI.

CRIME'S FINISH.

A GROUP was gathered in Crayde's study, with Police Chief Cartwright in charge. Hervey Grimm had just finished telling how he had come in, accompanied by Crayde's servants, to find Miriam making a phone call to Norgil.

Apparently the girl knew a lot about the murder, but she still stuck to her testimony. Her story seemed honest, and she looked very pitiful wrapped in the coat that had been returned to her, to cover what little remained of her scanty stage attire. But Chief Cartwright was not greatly impressed by her insistence that Norgil must be innocent.

Judreck, among the listeners, wore an expression that mingled surprise with innocence. Another man arrived just as the testimony was finished. The newcomer was Morton Rowden.

"It's up to Delaney," announced the police chief. "When he brings in Norgil—"

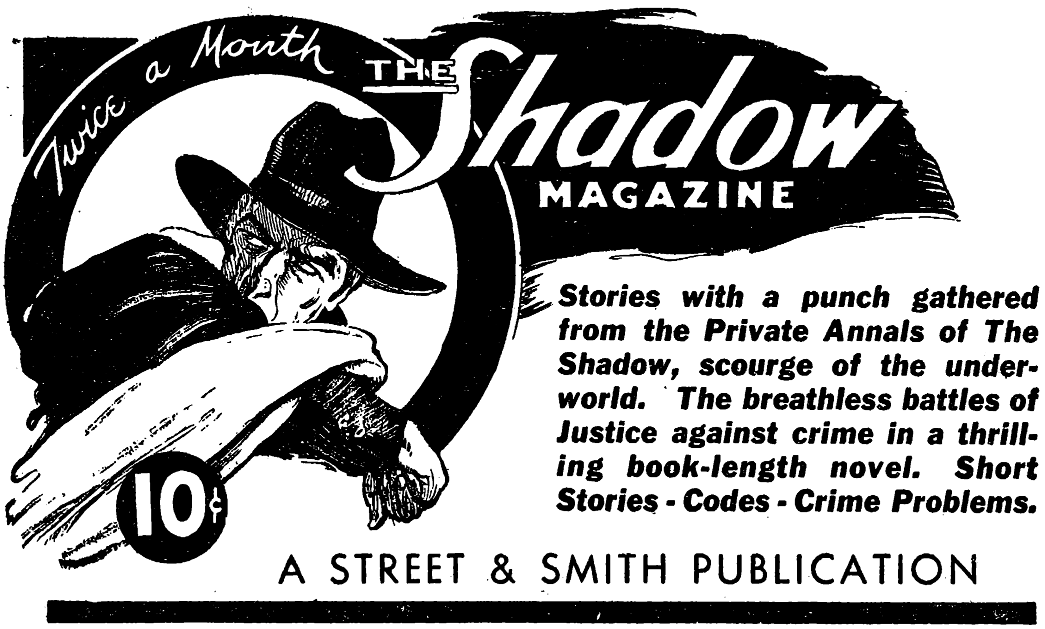
The door opened at that moment. On the threshold, suave as ever, stood Norgil. He smiled as Cartwright excitedly fumbled for a gun.

"I didn't murder Crayde," he announced. "The letter that he mailed me was never delivered. It was probably planted in my files later. There's the man that I accuse."

He pointed to Judreck.

"I suppose I took the gun, too!" exclaimed Judreck hoarsely. "And the medal! You can't pin this on me, Norgil—"

That was all Judreck could manage to say. Norgil, fingers dipped in his vest pocket, was bringing out a gold object which he handed to the police chief. Even Miriam was amazed, for Norgil was displaying an exact duplicate of the Maximilian



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Medal, of which only one was supposed to exist!

"This is the genuine medal," said Norgil. "The one that I see there on the desk is obviously an imitation. Too bad, Judreck, that you didn't have time to steal the real one. I suppose that you intended to do that later."

For the first time, the advantage was Norgil's. He made the most of it. Facing the confused Judreck, he deliberately accused the secretary of murdering Crayde.

Judreck's nerve began to weaken.

"I've got an alibi!" he screeched. "Get Delaney—ask him—he'll tell you that I was with him. I couldn't have come out here—"

"Why not call headquarters?" queried Norgil, facing the police chief, "and hear what Delaney has to say?"

Cartwright agreed that the idea was a good one. But before he could pick up the telephone, it began to ring. The call was for the police chief. When he had finished with it, he laid the telephone heavily upon the desk.

"Delaney has been murdered," he said solemnly. "Someone shot him, in a taxi. The driver escaped, then reported to headquarters."

JUDRECK was on his feet. But he wasn't staring at Norgil. His gaze went farther, toward a man who was shifting uneasily in the direction of the door. That man was Morton Rowden.

"You killed Delaney!" howled Judreck. "Murdered him, like you did Crayde. So you could kill my alibi along with him—"

Rowden's hand went to his hip, but he never drew the gun that he had there. Norgil was quicker in producing the revolver that he had captured from Tim Delaney.

His shot nipped Rowden's arm. The portly man groaned as he sagged to the floor.

Crayde's servants grabbed the murderer. Judreck, wildly anxious to vindicate himself, was pouring out his story in a fashion that could have stood no denial.

He had joined Norgil's show at Rowden's order, he confessed. For Rowden, it happened, was the one man in Westbury who had aided Crayde in crooked schemes, and had been anxious to spike Norgil's exposure of the swindler.

Norgil had needed a secretary, and Judreck had managed to get the job. From then on he had kept contact with Rowden. With the Old Home Week celebration due, Rowden had struck upon the happy idea of booking Norgil's show.

It had been when Norgil chased the dressing-room stick-up men from the theater that he had started to suspect Judreck. For it had been the secretary who had tripped the magician, a rather clumsy trick in order to aid the thugs' escape. And for a new man, Judreck had known entirely too much about the medal, for Norgil seldom told anyone about it. It was the secretary who had seen Norgil place the medal and the revolver in his dress-suit pocket in his dressing room.

The crooks who had faked the stick-up were tools of Rowden. With that for a starter, Judreck had handed the fake note to Norgil, its purpose to keep the magician at the hotel, where he would have no alibi.

Judreck, stealing the stage revolver and the Maximilian Medal, had passed them to Rowden. It was the promoter who had murdered Crayde, leaving the medal on the scene. The gun had gone back to Judreck, in the front office, and the secretary had left it in the dressing room, also filing the actual letter from Crayde, which Judreck had easily intercepted.

Judreck, of course, had needed an alibi. He and Rowden had agreed upon that. Judreck's chance to go along with Delaney had seemed perfect. But it hadn't worked as Judreck hoped.

"You thought I'd squeal!" Judreck was screeching the words at Rowden. "You figured you could frame me along with Norgil, and let the cops take their pick. That's why you croaked Delaney—"

A new sight stopped Judreck cold. A man was shouldering in through the doorway, his wrists handcuffed behind him, his mouth gagged by a handkerchief. His derby hat was gone, but it was still possible to recognize Detective Tim Delaney.

Norgil approached the detective with a key that fitted the cuffs. While he was releasing the manacled dick, the magician purred an apology.

"Sorry, Delaney," he said, "but you wouldn't listen. That's why I rigged you the way you are, and left you in the taxi. But I've trapped a murderer for you. Take him along."

Delaney took the wounded Rowden and Judreck with him, locked in the handcuffs that the detective himself had worn. Norgil and Miriam went back to the hotel with Grimm, where the lawyer made final arrangements to make public the facts of Crayde's crooked past.

"The estate will go through with the settlement," assured Grimm as he was leaving. "Amos Crayde has no heirs, and the claims are genuine. With a couple of other crooks also bagged, it looks as though you've cleared up everything, Norgil."

Miriam didn't quite agree with the last statement, and said so to Norgil while the magician was eating the dinner that he had missed. Miriam had remembered something that everyone else had forgotten in the rush.

"That second medal was a cute one," remarked Miriam. "It jolted Judreck when he saw it, because he thought that he had taken the only one there was. But how did you get the other one?"

Norgil's hands went to his pockets. He brought out the two medals. One began to crawl along the knuckles of his left hand, while the other performed its gyrations upon the fingers of his right.

"There always were two," he said with a smile. "Did you ever hear of a magician having anything—even a white rabbit—without a duplicate?"

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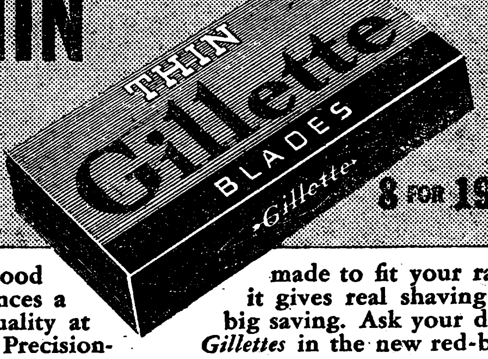

Chief Quinn Of San Francisco

Three Chiefs In Three Decades—And No Organized Crime—Is San Francisco's Record.

THE general public has various ideas of what a police chief should be, and of what he is. These ideas often vary with the city or town over which the chief presides. Were you to take an average picture of these impressions, you would probably see that a police chief in charge of a small-town force is supposed to be a nice, kind, family man who spends a great deal of his time puttering around the garden of his home; who knows everybody in the town by first name; who rarely, if ever, has to meet crime face to face, other than petty things as burglaries, occasional fist fights, and drunks.

The picture of a big-city chief would be just the opposite. The big-city chief is supposed to be a fire-eating, hell-driving, rip-roaring dynamo who rules his huge force with an iron hand; who challenges crime repeatedly via newspapers, radio, and public speeches; who personally directs campaigns to "clean up" the city—generally, just a veritable one-man scourge of crime.

There are examples of both types, so these pictures have much to back them up. But if you look at one of our greatest cities—San Francisco—and ask for its police chief, you will find yourself face to face with your idea of a small-city police chief, and be amazed to learn that he has been far more successful than any of the band-wagon, rip-roaring big-city chiefs anywhere! Possibly you will not wish to believe your eyes. You will want to take a trip around the city of San Francisco; you will want to talk to the merchants, the manufacturers, and the common people. After that you will be convinced; but you will still marvel, for in San Francisco exists a condition which seems practically ideal. You can't believe it until you prove it to yourself.

First of all, you expect a big-city police chief to last only a few years on the job. A change in political control; a big crime; almost anything is enough to make a police head lose his job. In San Francisco, three chiefs have been successive heads of the department for the last twenty-seven years, with the third one of them still in office, with every prospect of staying there until he feels that someone else should take control. The present chief is William J. Quinn, and he has been in office since 1929, when he took the place of Chief O'Brien, who resigned because of ill health.

William J. Quinn has a long history in the police department of San Francisco, just as practically every member of the department has. There are mighty few changes in the police force there; practically no wholesale shifting or revision. You do not get on the police force there unless you are really qualified; and once you are on, you find yourself in

Photo by Barboni Studio

CRIME BUSTERS OF AMERICA

William J. Quinn

Chief of Police, San Francisco, California

the company of such stalwart and honest men that you decide to make the job your life work.

Chief Quinn's own beginnings in the police department started with the great fire in 1906, when he joined the force. He saw the thriving young city reduced to ashes; he saw the people of that community face all the dangers and disappointments of that year to begin rebuilding a greater and better city. They began to build in the right way, and they dug deep into the ashes for the foundation of their police department. Perhaps the catastrophe was a fortunate incident, for it made all people there feel that every one must help the other; there were no hates, no intrigues, no "politics" to hinder the development of a sound city government.

WITH such a groundwork, it was only natural that William J. Quinn would go far ahead in his chosen profession. Hard work was necessary, and Quinn worked the hardest. In his earliest days, his beat was along the famous Tenderloin, in Chinatown, and in the Barbary Coast section. It was good training for a man who had the makings of a great cop. He had to handle all kinds of people; he had to be ready to do anything at a moment's notice. There were opportunities for all kinds of illegal "takes," and yet mighty few of San Francisco's cops have fallen to that lure. Certainly Quinn was far from being a prospect. But those things teach a man to resist temptation; they show him what opportunities are offered—and later, such experiences form a good background from which to form policies which will guide the entire force.

Quinn's work on patrol duty soon drew attention. He was made assistant chief clerk to Daniel O'Brien, who was chief clerk under D. A. White, then chief of the department. He was not content with this important advancement, and felt that there was more ahead of him; so he spent his evenings going to law school and received a law degree from the University of San Francisco. This was a smart move, for Chief Clerk O'Brien was promoted to chief of police upon the retirement of Chief White, and the additional training which Quinn obtained during these years made him the logical successor for the post of chief clerk and captain under Chief O'Brien. That was in 1920.

Nine years later, Chief O'Brien resigned because of failing health, and the continued progress of William Quinn made it a foregone conclusion that he would head San Francisco's police. The appointment was made January 1, 1929, and Chief William Quinn has been in charge since that time.

There is not much of the sensational to say about his career as chief of police, because there is nothing sensational about crime in San Francisco. San Francisco has practically no crime—which, in itself, is a sensational statement to make of any city that size! The reason it has no crime is because Chief Quinn, as well as the chiefs who have gone before him, build the police department according to the soundest and most progressive ideas. The result? Let Chief Quinn give you an idea in his own words:

"I HAVE watched San Francisco rebuilt from the ashes of the great fire of 1906, and I have seen our police department grow into one of the most outstanding police departments in the United States. We have no organized crime or criminals in our city; we have never had gangsters or racketeers; major crimes and crimes of violence are rare here; it has been two years since we even had an attempt at a bank robbery; periods of several days go past without a single major crime being reported to us; pickpockets and buncomen are now practically unknown here. We have not had a kidnaping for ransom in over forty years."

THAT is an enviable record. How many cities the size of San Francisco can lay claim to an equal one? How many cities, even of a smaller size, can do that? And San Francisco has no peculiar natural or commercial advantage which would make it so. It is subject to the same criminal possibilities as any other city might be; even more so, perhaps, since it is the largest city on the West coast. It might quite easily have become the center of criminal activity, and the public would accept that as a matter of course. Instead, it stands out strong and clear of any crime, a real monument to honest, unceasing, untiring effort.

The fact that the last three decades have seen only three police chiefs—two, besides Chief Quinn—may have a lot to do with it. The fact that all three have had similar ideas of law enforcement and organization of the police force has had a great deal to do with it, for the new man did not immediately proceed to tear down what his predecessor had done and built anew. Having come from the same school of thought, their ideas followed logically, and each man continued to build on the foundations laid down by his predecessor, thus adding to the strength of the structure rather than altering its design. Such effort is bound to bring results.

In addition to this, the San Francisco police department has always been eager to grasp at the newest and most modern devices for the aid of law enforcement. Keen minds, alert for anything new to help the force, are always ready to test new suggestions, and are the first to notice any definite trends in criminology. The San Francisco force is thoroughly modern in equipment; what is more, it is thoroughly modern in thought and ideas. There is not a "die-hard" in the entire department; those whose minds are not open to progress soon find that there is no progress for them in this modern staff, and they might as well look elsewhere for their work!

PROBABLY most notable of San Francisco's successful campaigns is its drive against sex crimes of violence and crimes againt women and children. Other cities have looked for the secret of this success, feeling that there must be some magic formula, some trick which makes this police force so successful in this field.

The formula has very little magic. It is all work; hard work, and constant work. A picked squad of plainclothes men constantly patrol the parks, playgrounds, and streets of the city. Schools and places of public gatherings are carefully watched by this group. This trained squad of men knows its business. This squad not only picks up, quite promptly, any offenders, but its training is so excellent that any one of the men can pick out suspects almost unerringly. Any loiterers or suspicious characters are taken care of immediately, and carefully questioned. If there is the slightest doubt as to their standing, they are either told to get out of the city, or

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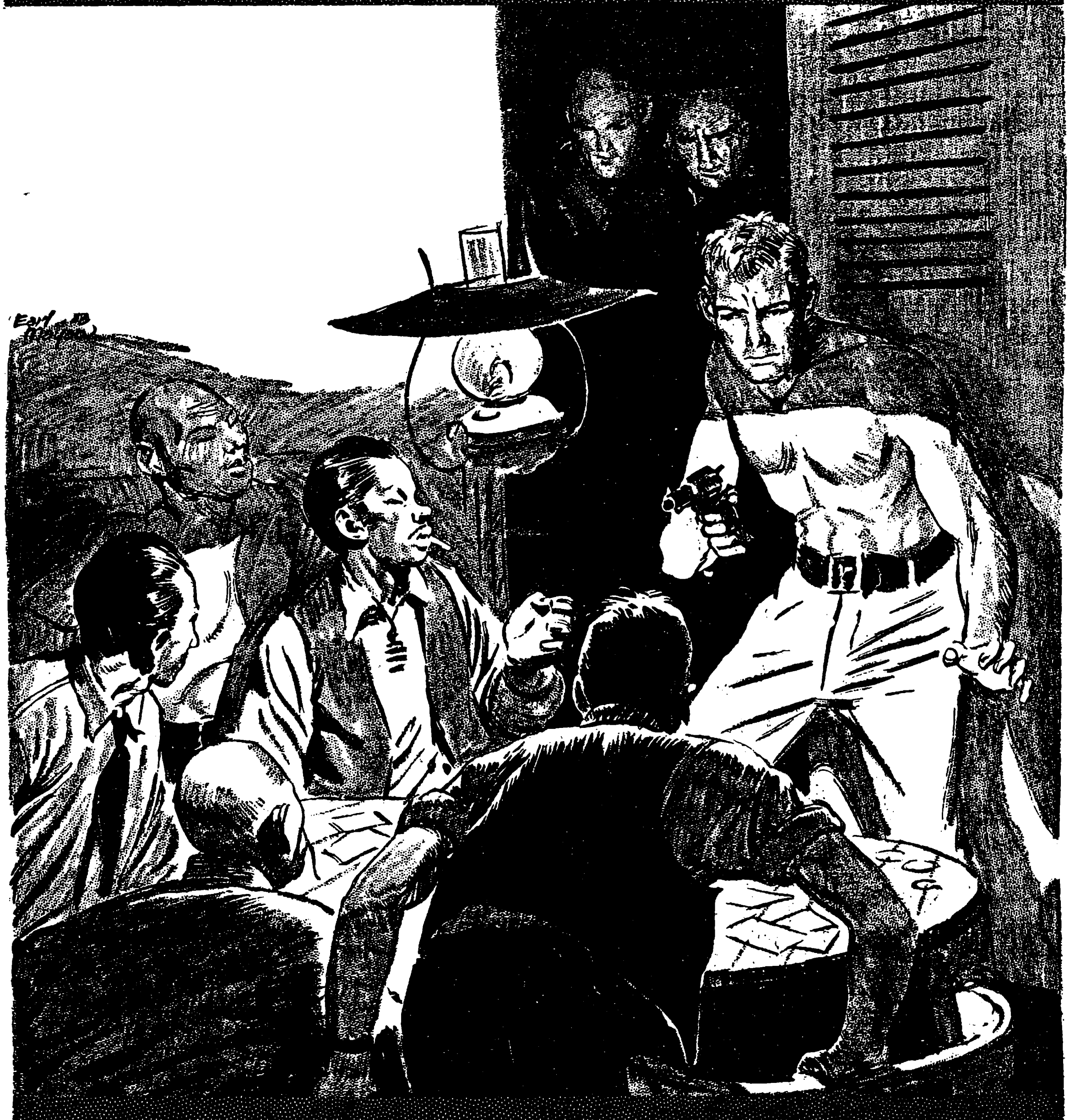
SPIES FOR SALE



THE PRICE TAGS MARKED IN BLOOD, WITH DEATH THE AUCTIONEER!

BY STEVE FISHER

Spies For Sale

CHAPTER I.

"MEET ME IN HELL!"

THE ship was miserable and decrepit, and it crawled stealthily down Puget Sound under cover of night; rats ran in the vessel's rotting belly, and as it moved through the velvet-black water, the wheezing and choking pump of the Diesel engines rattled the bulkheads and spewed the fume of oil throughout the compartments.

The man lay on topside, desperate and close to death, listening to the tempo of the ragged engines. His body jerked with pain at each trembling of the timber. The man who lay there should have been dead, for there were three bullets in his body.

Yet the man was conscious, and he was listening to the hushed *slip-slip* of water whispering along the ship's side; to the throb of the Diesels.

Seattle faded from behind the bubbles of their fantail, and this was one of the things of which he was thinking: The Seattle he had known, the life he had lived. He was thinking of a navy, of girls, and of headlines. Headlines his own name had made, among others; papers he had read in the cell in which they had put him.

"SAILOR MISSING," had been the first. Then: "TWO SAILORS DISAPPEAR"; and days later: "FOUR U. S. NAVY MEN VANISH." After that came: "SIX U. S. SAILORS MISSING IN MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCES THAT ROCK NATION." And the last of the headlines, the very last, yesterday: "EIGHT GOBS NOW GONE; FEDS RUSH TO SEATTLE AND BREMERTON; U. S. NAVAL INTELLIGENCE BAFFLED; EIGHT AMERICAN NAVY MEN VANISH FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH."

The man who lay on the deck of the filthy little freighter which was lumbering quietly—without running lights—down Puget Sound, was thinking of that. These headlines were in his mind, because he was one of the sailors.

He was one of the missing enlisted men, and he had been the first. The other seven lay below, beaten, wounded, their heads shaven bald, their faces streaked with saffron grease to disguise them in case of an unexpected investigation aboard.

They were, all of them, too weak for speech. They were unrecognizable; but they were alive. Even Federal men inspecting the ship might not realize their identity. The men were listed in the vessel's log simply as "suffering from malaria fever."

The man lying here—his name was Walter Thompson—knew that those men were below, because a short time ago he had been with them; he had been one of them. He did not know what destiny lay in store, but it occurred to him that it was possibly even worse than the living hell of this devil ship.

He thought of that, because he knew what cargo lay packed in this ship's squalid holds. He knew that directly beneath him lay tons of black gunpowder, and that the vessel was en route to the Orient where there was a war. He knew nothing further than that.

WALTER THOMPSON had been ingenious, as he had been while a gunner's mate in the navy, all his life. He had escaped the hole in which he had been thrown with seven of his American shipmates.

Cleverly, he had managed to creep up on deck. He had picked up a bludgeon—a marlin spike—and he had made a desperate stand. The bark of a gun, the knives of half a dozen seamen, the sudden wall of sweating Asiatic faces before him —Walter Thompson had crumpled in his tracks.

He lay there on deck, where he lay now, bleeding—left for dead.

But now he was conscious, though he felt lifeblood flowing from his veins. He knew well enough that he could last but a few more minutes. And he knew that the fate of the Americans below would be even worse than his.

His was the easy way out—oblivion. But those men below. They faced hell on earth. Unless—

Thompson stirred feebly. He grasped at a stanchion and pulled himself part way to his feet. He fell back. He strained and pulled, and then he was on his knees.

He remained on his knees for a few seconds until he felt a flicker of strength shiver in his muscles. The strength was born only of his ambition—the desperate will to do what was in his mind.

Walter Thompson swayed for an instant, and he thought he might have died then and there; but somehow, instead, he lived. He moved forward. He walked four steps, and he fell.

But his face was as smooth as stone now; his eyes burned brightly. He crawled along on his hands and knees. He reached up to the top of a hold. He began to pull back the canvas tarpaulin; he jerked at the pegs and lines; he loosened the winches.

He worked for several minutes, feeling strength pulse through him, and then retreat, like a thermometer which crazily moves up and down.

But at last he had uncovered the top of the hatch, and he was looking down at the planks which covered it. He lifted one plank and pushed it aside. He peered into the depth of the hold, and the acrid taste of gunpowder made a film on his tongue, and burned like pepper in his nostrils.

He laughed to himself, a soft laughter, as though he were losing his mind, which he was not. He was losing only—his life. It was quite clear what he had to do.

The ship was escaping the long arm of the law; it was running down Puget Sound and nosing toward the open sea, without lights, hiding in the darkness. And he knew that above all, above his own life and of those men below, the ship must not get away from the shores of the United States.

For if it did, those shipmates of his, prisoners below, faced a life of agony and bondage—made slaves by sneering Asiatics who had neither respect nor pity for white men.

SO there was this one course for Walter Thompson; and in it he considered neither that he was brave nor about to embark upon an act of

nobility. It was simply the only thing that he could do.

He fumbled in his pocket. He knew that what he wanted was there. Miraculously, it was there, because they had not anticipated he would get away from the hold; and it had not occurred to them when they shot him down, and stuck a knife into his ribs, that he was not dead.

"Perhaps," Walter Thompson thought, "perhaps they are right. I am dead, and it is only the reflex of my ambition which motivates and gives power to my physical body. For surely there is nothing to me of what was once. Laughter and love and Seattle are behind me, and I shall never see them again. My wife, our happiness, hopes and dreams—they are gone; washed from me by the bitter tears of days that separate that life from this. So perhaps I am a dead man, breathing in this instant only to fulfill a mission which I feel imperative—"

He dragged a match from his pocket. He did not know whether or not it was wet. He scratched it. It did not light.

Then, suddenly, he jerked erect. One of the ship's Tartar seamen was coming down deck. Walter Thompson tried to crouch, but the man saw him.

Desperately, Walter struck again at the match. He laughed almost insanely as the flame flickered up. The sailor rushed toward him, and Walter Thompson's laughter rocked like thunder.

"You're too late . . . too late! But I'll see you again. *I'll meet you in hell!*"

The match slipped from between his fingers.

The sense of its touch was scarcely gone before the wheezing little ship roared in an explosion that rocked the water into geysers and went shuddering through the trees on either side of the Sound. Yellow and red flared through the night. The bowels of the ship, loaded with gunpowder for thousands of guns, exploded all at once, exactly as though a million guns had gone off—

And later, when there was silence, burning splinters rained from the air and were quenched out in the water. They were splinters no bigger than the match which a minute ago had dropped from Walter Thompson's trembling hand.

CHAPTER II.

PRELUDE TO HORROR.

THE headlines just published said:

NINE SAILORS NOW MISSING

NATION SHOCKED AT HORROR OF GROWING MYSTERY

FEDERAL MEN ADMIT NO LEADS HAVE YET BEEN DEVELOPED

On the second page there was a small item:

> Residents of downstate Washington report distant explosion. Echo that was like thunder heard in many regions. The source of this sound has not yet been ascertained.

The memorandum sent in a code telegram from Washington, D. C., to Lieutenant Big Red Brennan, at a hotel in Seattle, Washington, read:

> YOUVE BEEN OUR ACE IN CRACKING THE BIGGEST SPY CASES IN THE COUNTRY STOP WE HAVE MUCH FAITH IN YOUR ABILITY STOP BUT WHY HAVE WE HAD NO REPORT FROM YOU AS YET ON THE SEATTLE CASE STOP THE ENTIRE COUNTRY IS APPALLED THAT WE ARE LETTING THESE APPARENT KIDNAPINGS OF U S

SAILORS GO ON STOP ABANDON ALL ROUTINE INVESTIGATION AND METHODS AND PROCEED IN SOME NEW MANNER OF YOUR OWN ORIGINATION STOP WE ARE BANKING HEAVILY ON YOUR ABILITY AND INGENUITY STOP KEEP IN TOUCH WITH US
CHIEF OF U S NAVAL INTELLIGENCE

Big Red Brennan crumpled the note in his hand and strode to the window. He had not thought the disappearances would go past eight. There had been a break of four days —but now a ninth man was gone.

He glanced at his notebook and went over his brief records on the case. The Intelligence wanted him to turn to another direction. But which? He read his first deduction. This fact was plain, although it had occurred with no significance to anyone else—Feds or police:

> ***All missing men are enlisted sailors; all men are of the rating of gunner's mate. 7 of the 9 men were above second-class gunner's mate rating.***

There seemed to be in this little that was important; and yet Red wondered now if he could attach to it sufficient meaning, so that he could derive from it a definite, new method of procedure on the case?

He glanced at the second page in his inadequate little book on the case thus far, and saw:

> ***5 of the 9 men often frequented The Boston Bean, a small and noisy restaurant at Pike Street and Third Avenue. 4 out of these 5 missing men who spent time in The Boston Bean, were last reported being seen there.***

This, of course, had been gone over. Everyone officially connected with The Boston Bean had been arrested and questioned; their entire past lives had been gone into, and at last they were released. It was only that the establishment was popular and that a majority of the navy men ashore in Seattle went to it at one time or another.

However, Big Red Brennan studied these two items, and finally, from them, he decided upon a course of action. He went to the telephone.

AN hour later, the things he had ordered arrived. He locked the door of his room and sat down in front of his dresser mirror, like a stage actor getting ready to make up for the night's performance. Big Red's countenance had appeared in too many newspapers in the past to go unnoticed by international spies.

He began to rub grease paint into his cheeks, but as he did this he looked directly into his gray eyes. They were hard, wide-set eyes; his cheekbones jutted, and his jaw made planes instead of lines. His hair was short-clipped, a vivid red, and his skin was leathery and seasoned.

Brennan was a big man. His arms and legs were thick, and his gun hand was steady. His heavy body was like a massive sand bag; for bullets had been pumped into it, and through it, and often he had been able to finish a case before being sent to a hospital. He had the strength of resistance against flesh wounds; and he had courage that made him the hardest and most dauntless Intelligence ace in the country.

But Brennan's brilliant and dangerous past was behind him. He was thinking now only of the future—the immediate future, and the horror that was in this case which lay before him.

"It'll be a merry chase to hell," Big Red said to the face in the mirror.

Later he was standing there and still looking at himself. His face had changed only a little, his eyebrows were darker, his hair was black instead of red, his skin was a complexion to match the new color of his hair, and his garb—instead of an officer's uniform—was blue sailor trousers and a jumper, with a first-class gunner's mate rating on the right sleeve.

It was a little chilly out, so he had used the excuse to add to his costume a heavy navy pea-jacket. He put this on now. He stepped to a table and picked up his .45 automatic. He slipped it into the inside pocket of the coat.

"If it's gunner's mates that are vanishing," Brennan thought, "I ought to look likely. I should be the next in line."

BUT nothing happened the first day in The Boston Bean.

Considering its reputation and popularity, it was a very small place. There were four booths with tables, and a counter. There were five pin-game machines, a radio which played always at deafening volume, and a number of pretty waitresses.

It was a tough place. It got the toughest men of the navy. There was always music on the radio, loud talking, shouting—drunkeness.

But though Big Red sat there all day, he was sober and quiet, and no one—outside of a sailor or two who asked him for a match—bothered him or offered to talk to him. Everyone was occupied. In addition, there was always obvious a civilian or two, and it didn't take brains to guess they were Feds.

That night Brennan made arrangements with the papers, and they published the news: "BOSTON BEAN FREED OF SUSPICION. SAILOR JOINT DEEMED INNOCENT."

Red thought this would help his case a little. The news was in the papers when he quit The Boston Bean at midnight.

But he was not ready for the screaming red headlines that affronted him the next morning:

TENTH SAILOR DISAPPEARS;
THIRD-CLASS GUNNER'S MATE
NEWEST MISSING VICTIM

DID NOT REPORT ABOARD
HIS SHIP
MAN'S FRANTIC PARENTS LIVE
IN SEATTLE

Big Red cursed his luck. He went to a liquor store and purchased a bottle of the cheapest whiskey. He spilled some of this on his uniform, washed his mouth with a swallow of it to taint his breath, then he returned to The Boston Bean and put on an act.

He was louder than the loudest. He spilled coffee into the lap of a blond waitress. He sang "Sweet Adeline" against a radio which was softly playing "Thanks For the Memory." In brief, he raised hell.

It was shortly after two o'clock that afternoon when the young, dark-haired girl picked him up. She had been sitting on a stool at the counter next to him. He noticed her gazing at him; when he glanced at her, she rewarded him with a half-hearted smile. Finally, she began to talk to him.

"There's a booth empty," she said. "Let's take it."

"O. K."

They sat across from one another in the booth. The girl did not come directly to the point. She laughed, she talked; she spoke on various small subjects. She played with him, and lead him out, and all the time he kept watching her.

She was no bigger than a minute, and she was beautiful. Her hair was like shiny, soft mahogany on her shoulders, and her skin was white and clear. Her eyes mirrored a darkness that looked almost like pain. She did not belong in The Boston Bean. That much was obvious. She was here for a reason. At last, she said:

"How would you like a job?"

CHAPTER III.

THE ELEVENTH VICTIM.

"WHAT kind of a job?" Brennan asked warily.

"Dangerous," the girl replied, unsmiling.

He laughed, because he had pretended drunkenness, and he could not fall out of it so quickly. "I don't even know your name. I—"

"Sandra will do for now," she said evenly.

"But—"

"The job I have in mind pays big," she continued, "and you look strong enough, if only you are willing to string along with me for a little while."

"Is it legitimate?"

"Are big things ever?" she asked.

He was sharp. "Do you know I could have you arrested for trying to proposition me on a thing like this? Do you realize—"

She cut in coolly, "I'll take my chances. I didn't ask for a lecture. Either you're interested or you aren't."

He gazed at her for an instant, and then he smiled.

"Definitely, with anyone so pretty as you—"

"Never mind *that,*" she said.

He shrugged. "O. K. What about the job? Do I get a few details, or don't I?"

"If you think I'm going to tell you here, you're a fool."

She was nervous; her voice was irritable. "I can't even be seen leaving here with you. It'd be dangerous. I'll go now; you come later. Meet me on the corner of Hile Street in—say an hour. Hile and Fourth. Is that clear?"

"Do I look like an idjet?" said Brennan. "Of course it's clear."

She smiled a little and touched his hand. "Till later then—"

He nodded. "So long, Sandra."

She got up and went out.

Big Red Brennan put a cigarette in his mouth and lit it. He felt a strong, tingling emotion surge through him. He was at last on the inside track; it'd be a race now through hell. He had his lead, and he'd play it till the last trump card fell.

But with this sense of uncompleted victory came another feeling to Brennan. It was an old one which he could never seem to quite outgrow. It was conceded that as an Intelligence officer, he was an ace—unexcelled, as his own chief said; but if he had a weakness, it was his instinctive trust in humanity—particularly feminine.

He had more than once been hoodwinked by a woman whose face he had sworn was honest. His deductive mind had always saved him before he was too far into the trap; but it was a fact that a beautiful young girl working with cutthroats and killers always struck a wrong note in him.

That was why now, sitting here, though he was well enough aware that Sandra worked for the agency which was responsible for the disappearance of ten sailors, he could not quite believe it. It had perhaps been that hurt, that wounded look he had seen in her dark eyes.

THE BOSTON BEAN was crowded. People were moving past him, and glancing at him. Brennan shrugged intolerantly at his own sentiment. He pinched out his cigarette and slipped into the pea-jacket which covered up his gunner's mate rating. He left a dollar on the table for his check, and then got up and left.

He stood on the sidewalk for a moment looking up and down. It was a raw, misty day, and the traffic on the street moved past him sluggishly. He put his hands in the side pockets of his pea-jacket and moved off down the street.

Three buildings from the corner, there was an old darkened theater; it had been closed up long ago, and the lobby was dusty and dirty. Brennan no more than noticed it, but from the stage entrance a woman suddenly dashed out at him.

She was young; her hair was blond and her face was pale. Her lips glistened too red with lipstick. There was terror in her expression. She clutched Brennan's arm.

"Help me . . . quickly! My little boy, they're trying to . . . to kidnap him. Oh, my God . . . *quickly!*"

"Where?" snapped Brennan.

She pointed a trembling finger toward the darkened entrance of the theater. "In there. I— Oh, hurry . . . *hurry!*"

She ran back, and Big Red dashed after her. His gun was already out, gripped tight in his hand. He plunged in through the musty alley, followed after the woman into the theater. The sudden darkness was a screen across his vision. For an instant he groped, and then something came slamming down across his head.

BIG RED realized in that instant —as his legs buckled, and his body wavered—that it had been a trap. He realized how the criminals had spotted gunner's mates from The Boston Bean, waited until they came out, and then sprang this sudden and urgent lure on them. Even he, experienced against such things, had been drawn by the subtle play of a woman's panic.

Brennan twisted his body, and as he did he heard the heavy stage-entrance door banged shut. He staggered against a wall, blood streaming from his head. He held his gun steady in a wavering hand, and his finger released the roar of thunder and yellow hell.

Wham! Wham!

The bleak and dull click of lead embedding itself in a wooden panel mocked his eardrums. Misses. All misses. But his eyes were growing more accustomed to the darkness. He saw a shadow moving toward him. He jerked up his gun, was ready to fire, when a noose slipped like silk around his neck.

Big Red's gun exploded, but the rope jerked tight around his neck, cut against his Adam's apple and stopped his breathing. He choked. He toppled sideways with the jerk against his body.

Three men appeared suddenly, and rushed at him. He was still being jerked by the rope; and now it was wrapping about his body. They were fighting him and tying him up in the same moment.

He struggled to grasp a hold on his gun. His fingers fumbled for the trigger. The .45 again exploded. A man groaned, caught his middle.

But the others flung themselves upon Brennan with the fury of their weight and force, and with panic, because they had believed him to be a sailor and had not expected gunfire. Nor had they reasoned against his strength and his fighting power.

Brennan was crushed beneath the weight of three men; and all the time the rope kept coiling around and around him: imprisoning his arms, catching together his legs. At last he fell, like a dummy thudding against the floor, and no sooner was he down than a man knelt by his head and let go again with the blackjack.

Brennan's temples seemed to burst. His consciousness reached toward the comforting blackness of oblivion. He fought to retain alertness, but he was losing; he was sinking in the abyss of the marsh of unconsciousness. And in his mind were the faces of two women: the dark-haired girl, Sandra, who must have spotted him, felt him out; and the blonde who had finished the job, lured him into this ancient theater.

The last thought that trickled from Brennan's weakening consciousness was this: *Now the papers would have new headlines.*

Big Red Brennan was the eleventh victim!

CHAPTER IV.

BITTER DESTINY.

THERE was no noise, really. The roaring was only the pain that screamed from his every muscle.

Nor could he at first open his eyes. He lay there, without seeing, but calculating many things. He realized from the stiffness that had grown all through him that he had been unconscious for a long time. Gradually, as his sense of feel and smell returned, he knew that the pain in him was numbing; and he felt the iron against his half-naked body, so that he realized he was chained somewhere.

The chains were thick and heavy, like those used in an old galley ship of a century ago when pirates threw mutineers into chains.

Then, at last, his eyelids fluttered and tugged against the glue that seemed to hold them shut; his eyes were opening, and he was looking around him.

Brennan saw that he was in a very small room, and from the walls he could discern at once that it was in the lower decks of a very old ship. There were no portholes, but from the center of the deck there stood a candle which flickered and frightened away the oppressive darkness.

These were the things Brennan awakened to at first; and then, as the minutes ticked by, and he slowly regained some of the will and the spirit that was he, other elementary things came to him.

There were eight iron bunks

crowded into this room. They stood stacked four high directly across from one another. They were lined in tiers. The lowest iron bunk was an inch from the deck; the second was just a foot and a half above it; the third a foot and a half above that; and the fourth hovered below the overhead deck with barely enough room for a man to be crowded into it.

Brennan was lying on a bottom bunk, his knees very nearly touching the springs of the cot above. The springs were somewhat less soft than lead pipes. Brennan saw the four bunks directly across from him; and looking upward he saw the three other bunks directly over him. The room was scarcely bigger than the space these bunks occupied.

The blunt, animal-fat candle had permitted him to see this much; but now as his eyes grew more accustomed, he saw more. He could not at first be sure, but gradually, the figures in the lower bunk opposite him, and the bunk just above that, materialized into men.

THEY were sailors. There were only two—three, counting Brennan.

Big Red did not know whether or not these men were conscious.

"Hey—" he said. He found his tongue was swollen with an acid that had evidently been put on it.

"Yeah?" The answer was a whisper from the lower bunk opposite him.

"Who are you?" Brennan said. He was struggling with his words to make them come out correctly.

"A gunner's mate, third-class, from the—"

"I get it," Brennan said. "And the guy above you?"

"I'm Smith, first-class gunner's mate," whispered the man in the bunk just above.

Brennan asked: "Did a woman—a blond woman—tell you something about a kidnaping—haul you into an old theater?"

They both replied that this was exactly what had happened to them.

"Shanghaied," said Loster, the man in the lower bunk, "that's what we are. Shanghaied. Like they used to do in the old days in Frisco when they wanted men for a ship. They slugged you and took you along. Only our fate's going to be more bitter than that. Me and Smith, we've already got some idea."

"But where's the other eight men?" Brennan asked.

"They must have been put on another ship and sent out already. We're the beginning of a new bunch. I suppose they'll get five more of us before this tub sails. Me and Smith figured where the tub is lying. We could tell by the sound of the woods, distant and everything. We're directly above Tacoma, see? Probably at an old pier in a hidden—or more or less hidden—cove. Nobody ever comes up this far. See?"

Smith spoke: "They've been taking on cargo. Day and night. We could hear the winches above us. I don't know what kind. I've got an idea we're slated to go to the Orient."

Brennan was straining his eyes. "What's the matter with the faces of you two?"

SMITH chuckled hoarsely, agonizingly. "They'll do it to you, too. They cut you up, make deliberate cuts, scar you; then they rub grease into your pores so it looks like you got jaundice, and you can't even wash it off with gasoline. Makes us look half chink or Tartar—or something. They've shaved our heads and treated them the same way. And the guy said before we sail they're going to fix our tongues so we can't do more than whisper —so we can't hardly talk. See? Then if anyone comes aboard, they'd never recognize us, and we'd be fixed quick so we couldn't tell them who we were."

"And they whip us," Loster continued, "with whips that have thongs on them. Oh, we've got a merry old trip ahead! The idea probably is that some crooks are selling gunpowder to both sides in the Asiatic war. Doesn't make any difference which. And they're short of good gunners. We figured this from what they told us. By the time they get us over there, they expect to have us in such a condition—whipped and cowed and cut up—that we'd do anything to keep alive. Then they'd sell us to either side—or to the Tartars, as gunners. In other words we—"

"It's clear," Brennan cut in. "In other words, besides shipping over gunpowder for both sides, a bunch of cutthroat international spies got an order for human cargo—American sailors that could handle big guns. Because they're short as hell of gunners in China. Good gunners, that is. So they're getting American sailors—and selling them. Gunners and spies for sale!"

"Exactly," Smith croaked bitterly.

"It's the rottenest thing I've ever run into," Brennan breathed.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I'm not just a gunner. I'm an Intelligence agent. I got myself kidnaped to get on the inside track. I—"

"Geez! But what can you do? You're chained to that damn bunk."

"I know it," Brennan replied. "Don't they ever let you up?"

"No. We're like hospital patients. They feed us fats left over from their own meat. Fats that are rotten and stink—and soup, like water. It's the soup we drink. That's our only liquid. They know we'd rather die than sail with them; they know we're more desperate than guys in a condemned cell would be. So they take no chances."

Brennan felt hope shatter inside him. He writhed against the chains which held him in bondage. He could not know that once a man named Walter Thompson had escaped his chains—had managed to crawl to the deck and blow up a ship similar to this one. But Thompson had been small, and the chains that bound him rusty and weak. The chains about Brennan were solid and strong.

Silence dropped between the three men. The candle flickered desperately, and sputtered softly in the room. Above them the ship was empty, and Brennan knew that it must be nightfall.

Suddenly, there was a stealthy movement outside the small room. Brennan jerked rigid. Smith and Loster lay intently and listened. The door creaked slowly open.

Brennan saw the shadow of a figure. It moved toward his bunk, and all at once he saw who it was.

It was Sandra!

There were keys in her hand, and she knelt down beside him. Her face was white, her dark eyes glowing.

"You didn't keep our appointment on Hile Street and Fourth," she said.

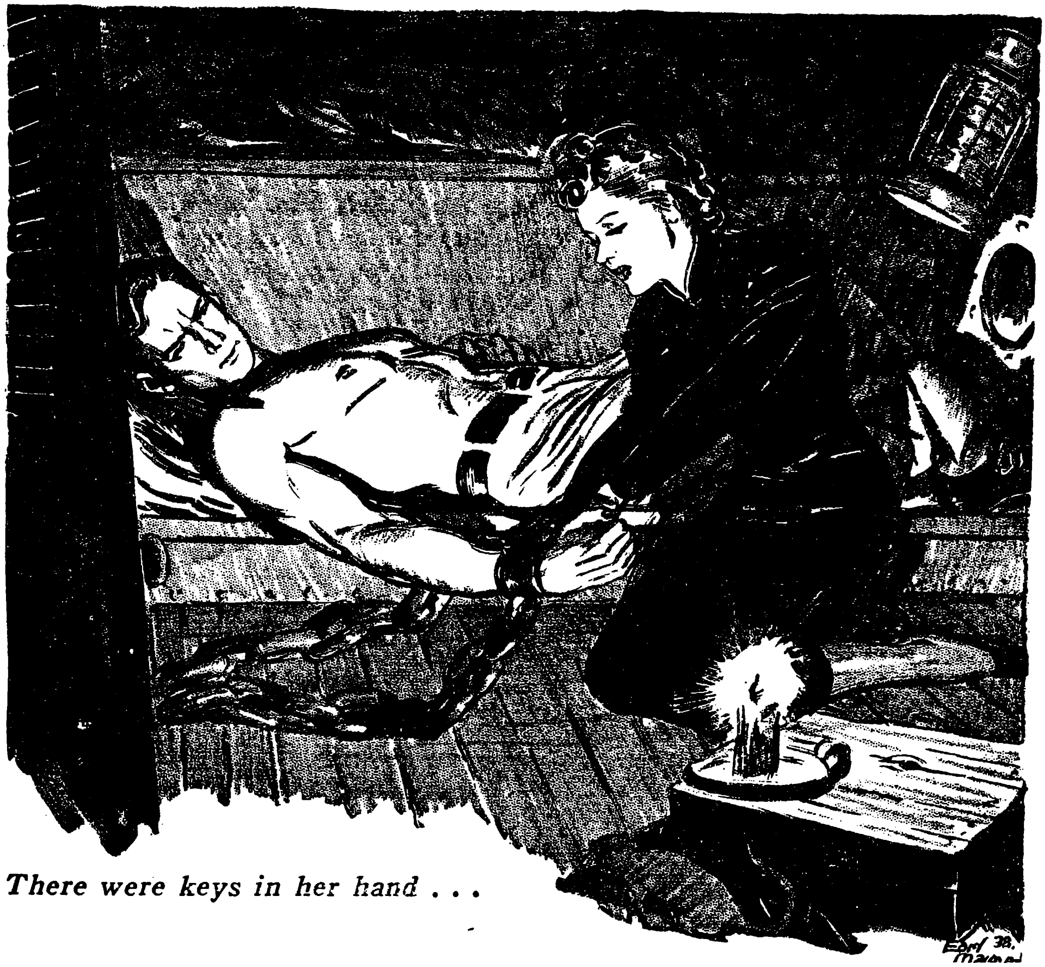
CHAPTER V.

SANDRA THOMPSON.

"DID you expect that I would?" Brennan demanded.

"I didn't know."

"It was clever," he went on, "the way you tricked me."



There were keys in her hand . . .

"I didn't trick you," she said quickly. "I was sincere when I said I had a job for you and that it was dangerous. My name is Sandra Thompson. My husband was Walter Thompson, the first gunner's mate who disappeared. I want to find him, or to find out what happened to him. The police and Feds seemed to be getting nowhere. So I reasoned that since the kidnaping of sailors was still going on, that perhaps if I worked on my own, with a gunner's mate like you, we could get somewhere."

Brennan breathed deeply. "Oh —that's different! You had a plan, a—"

"Yes," she said. "But there's no need of going into that now. When I left The Boston Bean, I wasn't sure whether you'd meet me or not. So I waited across the street to see which way you'd go when you came out. I saw that blond woman rush out and drag you into the old theater. I would have called the police then, but you went with the woman of your own will and I wasn't at all sure that anything was wrong. I remained where I was across the street—sitting in my roadster—and waited for you to come out of the theater.

"You never came out, of course. But later, a dark sedan drove out from the alleyway. I realized then that something must be wrong. But if I was to find out what it was—to follow that sedan—I wouldn't have time to call the police. There was nothing I could do when I saw the sedan drive out but to follow. And I wanted desperately to find out what had happened to my husband."

"Yes?" Brennan said.

Smith and Loster were staring at the girl, and listening.

"Well, I followed the sedan," Sandra Thompson went on. "They drove rapidly right through Seattle, out onto the highway, and through the hills to Tacoma. They sped through Tacoma never once suspicious that I was a block or so behind. They hit out on a narrow and lonely road. There weren't many cars, so I dropped back half a mile, and almost lost them. When I saw them slow down, and realized that in the distance there lay an abandoned fishing cove, I stopped. I parked my car and waited.

"I hid the car in the woods. It was hours before the sedan drove back. But the moment it had gone on toward Tacoma, I drove as close to the ship as I could get, again parked, and came up here on foot. I saw only one man on deck. I waited. I crept close to the ship. It was already getting dark.

"In my original plan to find the solution of this mystery I was going to need a gun. So I had a small one with me in my purse. I crept aboard the ship. As it turned out, I was able to creep up behind this Oriental I had seen aboard. I hit him with the butt of the gun. He turned around and I hit him again—on the forehead. He dropped. I got these keys off him. I reasoned that you and the other missing sailors would be aboard this ship. So I groped through until—"

"Good girl," Brennan breathed.

"Do you suppose Walter is here —in some other part of the ship?"

IT was Loster who spoke. "I know there's no one but us. There was another ship that left, lady. Your husband must have been aboard that."

She nodded bleakly. "Such a thing had occurred to me," Sandra admitted quietly. "There was a lapse of four days between the first eight men who were kidnaped, and the ninth man, though the disappearances have been one a day since."

She began trying the locks that held Brennan's chains. It was only a moment before he was on his feet. He released Loster and Smith.

The two sailors were weak. They could scarcely stand. Their faces had been horribly cut; and their pitiful bald heads gleamed through the candlelight. The saffron grease which had been rubbed into their pores made a yellowish glint.

"I brought an additional gun," Sandra said. "I picked it up off the man I knocked unconscious."

Brennan took the weapon; he relieved Sandra of hers and gave it to Smith. He handed Loster a winch.

"Now look," he said. "We've got to find out where the powder and munitions factory is located. But the first thing we're going to do is go up to that cabin and capture the men who are now aboard—probably in the cabin. There can't be so many if the big bosses went away in the sedan. And we'll take them by surprise."

"Right," Smith said, gripping Sandra's small revolver. "Boy, I've prayed for a chance to get at those babies!"

Loster whispered: "Me, too!"

IT is the popular notion that men engaged in the dangerous profession of munitions smuggling have no more to do in their spare time but to plot and plan their evil. But the five men who were in the cabin of the small ship as Brennan, two gunners' mates and a girl crept up deck, were engaged in neither pulling the wings off defenseless flies nor torturing defenseless women.

They were sitting about a table playing poker. There were four half-breed Asiatics, and one white man. They all carried guns.

Brennan moved up under the cabin window. The white man was talking.

"You know what happened to *The Coaster,*" he said. "Maybe one of you ought to go down and look at those prisoners. The last we heard from *The Coaster* was that a guy named Thompson had escaped the chains and was making trouble. They radioed they had killed him. But they must have been wrong. Because the ship blew up before it ever got out of Puget Sound."

An Asiatic on the white man's right said: "Trouble with you is—you're a jitterbug. Samoto is guarding those men below." He spoke amazingly clear for an Oriental; it was as though he had been schooled in America.

"You know what'd happen," whined the white man, "if a match was lighted to our cargo?"

A smile lit the face of one of the other Asiatics. "I beg your pardon. We *wouldn't* know what happened. It would come too quick."

He had no sooner finished speaking when something else came—and too quickly. Brennan had rushed in through the door, the sailors behind him. He covered the men in the room.

"It'll be easier if you'd put up your hands—" he started.

The white man lifted his hand,

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threw an ash tray at the light and smashed it out.

Brennan's gun roared. Hell broke.

A man screamed.

There was a crashing as the table went over. Brennan's gun kept jumping; his face was streaked with sweat. Two men dashed through the door, bowled over Sandra Thompson, and kept going. One of the Asiatics was on the floor, writhing. Loster and Smith had the other two backed to the wall.

Brennan yelled: "Hold them. And get that Samoto out on deck. He must be regaining consciousness about now. Hold the ship, you two, till we can get the F.B.I. down here. I'm going after those guys who escaped. It's our one chance of finding out where the munitions factory is. They'll probably make a run for it. And if we don't find out now, we never will!"

"Oke," Smith replied.

"We'll hold them," Loster said.

Brennan was out on deck now, rushing after the white man and the Asiatic who had escaped.

Big Red ran down the gangway, then he paused. Sandra was catching up.

"I'm going with you," she said. "We'll use my car—"

CHAPTER VI.

HEADQUARTERS.

THE white man and the Asiatic had leaped into a car and were already streaking down the road in the opposite direction from Tacoma; were riding deeper into the woods, farther upstate, toward the Canadian border. In their panic, they had no idea that they were being followed. They could not know that Big Red was at the wheel of Sandra's car; that his foot was gunning the gas.

Big Red's eyes were feverishly hot. He snapped out the car's lights. The machine bounced across the road; the tires whined.

"We'll ride without lights," he said. "They'll never know we're behind. Scared fools! Rats running to their hole, that's what they are. Nothing could be sweeter for us!"

"Yes," said Sandra, "but the munitions factory will be headquarters. We'll be hopelessly outnumbered. What we should do is find out the location, then go back for aid."

"Exactly," Brennan agreed.

Only it didn't turn out that way.

They followed the blinking red taillight of the car ahead of them for more than an hour around turns and detours, and never once did they pass another vehicle. They followed the wildly racing auto of the dealers in munitions and human lives.

And they came so rapidly that they had made the sharp, right turn and swept in through the camouflaged walls of the factory before they realized there were even walls there. It looked only like a thicket of woods. The car they had followed was stalled now; the men were running from it into the building.

Brennan knew the odds that faced him here. And his gun had but one bullet left.

He whirled the car in a complete turn, swept out toward the entrance through which he had entered. But huge iron doors that had opened for the internationalists now clanged shut.

Brennan slammed on the brakes of his car. He heard a siren wail from the factory behind him. Floodlights came on at once and poured whiteness across the grounds. They had all the emergency gear in use. They were prepared against siege. It was almost like a prison break.

It had come so swiftly, the upsurge of events, that Big Red and Sandra had scarcely time to realize what had happened. They were trapped. They were hemmed in. Floodlights plainly showed their car. Machine guns were being propped in the factory windows. Men with rifles were running toward them. It was as though the jaws of a huge alligator was closing down on them. There was no way they could turn.

And Brennan's gun had one bullet!

"It's the end," Sandra whispered.

"I'm sorry, kid."

"It was worth it," she breathed, "this effort. We had our moment of victory, and now it's gone. But the price paid for one sweet moment has never been greater than the reward." She smiled faintly. "I . . . I'm ready for this—"

"But it's not us," Brennan said. "It's the government—all those men —*we can't lose!*"

He shifted the gears of the car. The motor roared. The men were rushing toward them, shooting now. The machine guns in the windows hadn't yet begun to chatter. The huge arc lights were blinding.

"Hold on," said Big Red Brennan. "We're going to hell!"

HE shot the car forward. They mowed down the men in their path, kept going; then, at the crucial moment, Big Red jerked open the doors. He caught Sandra under one arm and leaped for the ground. The car was still moving rapidly forward. It crashed into the building, mangled against it. Wood splintered. The nose of the car had driven through the wall.

Big Red picked himself up from the ground; he was still holding Sandra. He jerked the trigger of his gun and punctured the car's gasoline tank.

Flame spurted from every side as the gasoline exploded. The car was a mass of flames. The fire licked into the side of the factory. It would be no time before it touched off the tons and tons of gunpowder which was stored inside. The whole side of the munitions factory wall was burning now.

The men with rifles, and the machine-gunners, changed their tactics. They were no longer interested in Big Red or the girl. They knew what would happen the moment the flames touched the powder. They knew that everything would be demolished; that no living thing could withstand the explosion. The iron gates were swinging open. The men were running for their cars—running for their lives.

Big Red tensed himself, and waited. The first high-powered car came roaring out of the garage and up to the entrance of the factory to pick up other people. But Big Red had thrown himself on the running board.

He caught his arm under the driver's jaw. His finger poked in a dangerous jujitsu movement, tore the man's neck. He hurled the driver to the ground, motioned Sandra to get into the still empty car.

She did this at once. Brennan put himself behind the wheel, shot the car rapidly toward the gate. He swept out through it, and stopped.

The flame was licking along the walls of the factory. It could be but seconds before the explosion. Other cars were coming from the garage, pulling up at the building door.

Brennan leaped from his machine. The gateman leveled a gun at him. Brennan's fist lashed across the gateman's jaw; he disarmed him, then rushed into the gatehouse. He threw the switch. The iron gates clanged shut. There was no other escape. He shorted the switch so the gates could not again be opened, and then he left the gatehouse and climbed back into the car.

AS the machine roared down the road, he could see in the rear-view mirror the desperate international spies scaling the high wall, dropping to the ground, running on foot. But it was futile. They could never outrun the explosion which was already overdue.

Big Red drove madly, and the factory was lost behind his car; he thought of Smith and Loster on the ship, and he knew they could hold the three men who were there.

Sandra Thompson moved closer to him, caught his arm, and shivered.

Three minutes later, when they had gone almost three miles from the factory, they heard the thunder that was the explosion.

Big Red Brennan shuddered, for he knew that the end of life had come for the international agents who had dealt in gunpowder and human lives; the men who had offered gunners and spies for sale.

He was sorry he had been unable to capture them, though he knew they deserved this death; but it had been the only course they had left for him. Had he allowed them to escape in cars, the government might never have gotten them. They would have fled over the Canadian border. But now, in one explosion, their activities were closed for once and forever.

Big Red Brennan had reached across the gap into another world and shaken the hand of Walter Thompson, for his course had been the same.

Sandra Thompson and Red Brennan had finished what Walter started.

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Number of miles run ____________ Did you buy it New or Used? ____________

Does it have a Radio? ______ What make? ____________ Heater ______ Make ____________

List Brand names of Tires: Front left ____________ Front right ____________ Spare ____________

Rear left ____________ Rear right ____________ Spare ____________

When were tires purchased? Front left ____________ Front right ____________ Spare ____________

Rear left ____________ Rear right ____________ Spare ____________

How old are your present spark plugs? ____________ years ____________ months

What brand did you buy as replacements? ____________

Have you ever put in new Piston Rings? ____________

What brand Piston Ring did you use? ____________

List other equipment you have added to car ____________

NAME HERE ____________

ADDRESS HERE ____________ CITY ____________ STATE ____________

Continued from page 74

so carefully watched that they soon find San Francisco the wrong place for themselves. Offenders who are arrested learn that the police have memories longer than newspaper headlines; there is no letup in the punishment meted out to such offenders! That, in itself, is enough to keep others away.

Another important thing in this campaign against crime is the "Big Brother Bureau" which the police department has developed. This department is the particular pride and interest of Chief Quinn, and it has served as a model for countless other police departments which have organized similar bureaus for such work in their own cities. San Francisco's efforts in this respect marks them as pioneers in this work.

The result of the work of the Big Brother Bureau cannot be counted by the record, for most of its work must be considered as preventive, and this never does show in records. But, judging by the small amount of juvenile crime, one can understand the marvelous work which this bureau is doing. It has built up a feeling of comradeship between the youngsters and the police that is worth a fortune to the city, for not one of these youths who have come to know the cops as their friends and companions will turn toward crime. The officers have imbued the youngsters with such strong feeling of honesty and justice that nothing but the greatest of temptations, the most severe circumstances, could make them fall for crime. By this work they have decreased the number of "problem" boys in San Francisco to almost nothing, and they have rehabilitated hundreds of youngsters who were headed in the wrong direction.

ALL this work, curiously enough, is the result of the effort and planning of a police chief who is not at all the "typical" chief. He has come up from the ranks of the cops themselves, not from the ranks of politicians; he has made policing his life work, and has shown that it pays. At the same time, he has lived the life of a very normal, conscientious citizen, having his friends and acquaintances much the same as anyone else. You wouldn't think he was the chief of his city's police from his quiet family life, his neat home in a good section of the city, and his family. Chief Quinn has three children; two boys and a girl. They are all attending college at the present time.

The two boys are taking after their father—both having their interest in the law. William, Jr., is twenty-two years old; John is twenty-one. Both are enrolled in the University of San Francisco, studying law. Here is one case where the father is interested in having his sons follow his own career, and is modern enough to realize that training is a big help. The modern cop should have a thorough grounding in law; a lawyer who has a background of police work such as these two boys must have should prove an invaluable aid to the cause of justice. What is more, both boys are outstanding students—so there is every prospect of them carrying on the family name to even greater honors.

The one daughter, Mary, is attending the Dominican College in San Rafael, California. She is majoring in French, and intends to become a teacher.

Chief Quinn certainly has done a very good job as a policeman, and an excellent one as a father and citizen.

POSSIBLY you will wonder whether there is any crime in San Francisco at all; whether there aren't any outstanding criminal cases in that entire city. Although organized crime is practically non-existent; although criminals steer clear of the Golden Gate, no amount of police work will prevent individual crime from springing up. San Francisco's famous such case is the "Egan Case," an outstanding example of a wide-awake police department which does not take anything for granted. Were it not for the fact that a seemingly pat case did not satisfy San Francisco's police until everything was settled, a murder might have gone by unavenged.

The latter part of April, 1932, the body of a woman—Mrs. Jessie Scott Hughes—was found lying on the street in a quiet residential section of San Francisco. The police were notified.

Marks of tires were on the woman's dress, but a thorough examination tended to show that there was a high possibility of these prints having been placed there after the woman was dead; that the woman was killed elsewhere, and her body dumped here. The woman was a widow, without relatives, but a Frank J. Egan, San Francisco's public defender, a friend of the dead woman, came forward to claim the body and take care of its interment. Everything seemed to be settled—but the police were not so easily satisfied. They kept looking for clues, and finally found them in the woman's house.

Neighbors reported having seen a car come from the garage in Mrs. Hughes' house, although she owned no car. The scientific laboratory was put on the case; took prints of the tire tracks, and started its search. Soon they discovered the car, connected up its driver with Frank J. Egan, only to find Egan missing from his home. A statewide search was started, and Egan found in a sanitarium.

He was brought up for trial claiming that his mind had gone blank as a result of a mental collapse. But the police had gathered enough evidence to show Egan had profited by other "unsolved" murders, and as a result he was sentenced to life imprisonment in San Quentin prison.

EXCELLENT planning, and a decided tendency to look ahead and provide for emergencies that may arise, is the thing which keeps the San Francisco police department ahead of the criminal. Of course, every large city police department must plan ahead for various conventions and large gatherings which occur in metropolitan centers, but it seems that San Francisco is far ahead of most of them in getting the newest and most effective methods of planning for such occasions.

For example, the coming exposition on "Treasure Island," in San Francisco Bay, will be the attraction for all kinds of light-fingered gentry, and small as well as big crooks and thieves. The general way of attending to such things is simply to put on a lot of extra policemen and plain-clothes detectives to spot the crooks as they operate—or maybe even to spot them before, and thus turn them in.

The trouble with that, of course, is that it requires a great many men, and that, even with a large force on duty, some thefts and "confidence games" are bound to be committed before the cops get the crooks. So, for "Treasure Island," Chief Quinn has devised a new system which will not only greatly decrease the possible crime on the exposition grounds, but will serve to present the crime problem to the people in a very forcible way.

First of all, the San Francisco police have issued a definite notice to all criminals that the exposition grounds, as well as the rest of the city, are "taboo" as far as known crooks are concerned. The mere presence of a known criminal there will be sufficient reason to cause his arrest.

That happens in quite a few places, and is nothing new to the crook. After all, he can probably get by for several days without being recognized, especially if he's careful. And in several days he can do himself some good!

But there's more to this at San Francisco. Whenever a crook is recognized and caught, he will be more than arrested; he will be placed on exhibition. Every hour, throughout the duration of the exposition, the police department will have a special "line-up" for the benefit of patrons of the exhibition. In a building especially prepared for this purpose, all the people arrested on the exposition grounds will be paraded before the public, with full explanation of reason for arrest, past history, and other details about the man and his criminal habits. This will all be done with the "line-up" background, the lights, and everything else staged just exactly as it is done at police headquarters.

If the criminal's only offense was his presence at the exposition grounds, he will be shipped out of the city the next day and told to stay out. If he was caught in the commission of a crime, he will get a sample of the swift and efficient justice that the San Francisco courts can give.

Although some people have already criticized this plan as making a "spectacle" of crime, most people have heartily agreed with it as a fine way of making the public realize how close crime comes to them every day. Certainly the criminal has no comeback; he is a known criminal, and therefore should obey the regulations of the city in regard to his status, or suffer the consequences.

OF course, there are other than the regulation criminal problems which confront the police. Because San Francisco is the leading city of the coast, it has the usual leading city problems in that conventions and other such gatherings naturally pick this as the scene of their activities. This means that the police must be ready to handle tremendous crowds which tax the limits of hotels and streets.

All these affairs are conducted in a very efficient manner, for the Frisco police have learned that individuals or crowds can be handled equally well in the same manner—fair and square treatment for all. Because the police, through means of permits and other records which they keep, know just exactly how many people to expect at these various affairs, they can plan accordingly, and therefore provide for emergencies ahead of time. In other words, if they are prepared for anything, nothing can get them by surprise to result in a tie-up or other similar difficulties.

San Francisco's system of streets is a big help in solving the modern traffic problem. The streets are arranged in the "checkerboard" manner, which allows for swift movement of traffic with the least amount of interference. It has, however, its share of focal points, since the city is located on a peninsula. Each year the city spends tremendous sums in new construction in order to ease this traffic. The famous Golden Gate Bridge is probably the best known of these.

Another famous "landmark" of San Francisco is the Chinatown quarter. This is merely a few blocks, but in it is all the picturesqueness of the Orient. Chinatown is hemmed in by the financial, hotel, and apartment-house districts, and although fiction would have the Chinatown in San Francisco, as well as the Chinatown in New York, a place of mystery where a menace lurks at every corner, actually both Frisco's and New York's Chinatowns are nothing of the sort. The major industry of the Chinese in these places is to cater to the tourist trade. Although all efforts are bent to make the houses as mysterious as possible for the benefit of the tourist, there is no mystery to Chinatown as far as the police are concerned. They know every influential member of the small community; they know what is going on, and know what to do in case things do not head in the right direction. The day of the Tong wars is past; the Chinese today present no more of a problem than do any other nationalities who live in districts of their own.

THE educational program of the San Francisco police is an important factor in its successful handling of the city's problems, and it is one of its most favorable assets in the task of policing a great municipality.

To begin with, the police have the hearty coöperation of all civic bodies, because the record of the department is such that everyone is quite well satisfied with it. The result is that there is never any difficulty in securing the help of public or press in putting over anything new.

Civic and fraternal organizations make a practice of asking ranking officers of the department to speak to them on criminal problems of the day. It is a means of interesting every citizen in doing his duty, and making him realize how very important is his own part in the task of law enforcement. The schools play an important part in this because of their activities in the Big Brother movement. The press is equally enthusiastic in its support, and by this means further arouses the interest of the public.

All this interest and coöperation of the public may make it seem that the police have a comparatively easy task of keeping the law enforced. No doubt it does help—but remember that all this interest and coöperation came as a result of the work of the department and its chiefs, therefore they deserve all the benefits which come as a result of it! It is a good example for other chiefs, and other cities, to follow.

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CLUE IN PINK

which led to the smashing of a bloody murder ring!

BY

NORMAN A. DANIELS

Clue In Pink

CHAPTER I.

PAID TO KILL.

THERE were two men in the seat of the speeding coupé. The one behind the wheel had to take a deep breath every time he swerved a corner because he was clamped uncomfortably against that wheel. Not that "Hunk" McTurk was fat—far from it. Hunk was just big.

"I wish," he said, "there was a sireen on this buggy. I like sireens."

Jeff Patrick, lean, craggy-chinned, laughed softly and pointed to the speedometer. "You're doing sixty-five, Hunk. Better cut down."

Hunk dropped her to sixty-four. Then, suddenly, his big foot came down on the brake pedal with a thump. Tires screeched and the coupé shivered. Someone stood in the middle of the road waving a flashlight. That someone wore a uniform and a badge.

"Now," Jeff said grimly, "we're in for it. Right through a speed trap. That's a State cop, Hunk. Better think up something good."

The trooper put one foot on the running board and turned the ray of his flash into the car. He surveyed Hunk and then, in turn, Jeff.

"Traveling pretty fast, weren't you?" he asked. "Any reason for wanting to dust by this spot at sixty or seventy? Been along this road before tonight?"

"No," Jeff said. "We're on our way to see Peter Bishop. What's wrong?"

The trooper gestured down the road where headlights of cars were dimmed, but flashlights cut a dozen swathes through the darkness. "Another hit-and-run artist. This makes the fifth in as many weeks, and all along this stretch. I'm taking a look at your bus for signs of an accident."

He looked around intently and found no traces of banged fenders or broken headlight lenses. "Okay—but take it easy," he waved them on.

Hunk wiped the back of his neck, whistled and started the car. Jeff leaned out. "Stop, Hunk. I want a look at this."

He climbed out. A lieutenant of State troopers regarded him with a scowl that changed magically to a welcoming grin. "Hello, Jeff. No see for months."

Jeff shook hands. "Been busy. Hm-m-m—that poor guy certainly got himself smeared. Looks like a tramp. Is he?"

The lieutenant assented with a nod. "All of them have been bums. Five killed along this road, Jeff, and do you know why? This highway is lousy with night spots. They serve the kids booze enough to float 'em home, and then what happens? They sock a guy and keep on going. One of these days we'll nail one of 'em and hang him to the highest limb."

Jeff knelt beside the mangled body of the victim. From a cursory examination, he figured that every bone in the tramp's body had been crushed. He saw something pink clinging to the dead man's clothing. Only a few particles, but that was enough, for Jeff lived by curiosity. Which was what had made him head of Tracer Service, Inc., the greatest private detective agency in existence specializing in locating lost people. He rubbed the pink stuff between his fingers and it crumpled to dust. The man's back was covered with the stuff.

Jeff got up and dusted his hands.

"Poor guy—never knew what struck him. Good luck, lieutenant, on finding the road hogs responsible for this. See you again."

Jeff explained to Hunk as they resumd their journey at a more leisurely pace. They pulled up in front of a mansion, set off by towering trees and well-cultivated shrubbery. Hunk drew a deep breath and slid from behind the wheel.

A MAN in an expensive lounging robe let them in. He led the way to his study and closed the door. Peter Bishop looked the typical banker. He had brown hair now well mixed with gray. He carried himself erect as a ramrod, and he had a jutting, determined chin.

"I called you in, Mr. Patrick, because I don't want the police mixed up in this. You've done work for my bank—locating heirs and such. I want you to find my son and bring him home."

Jeff merely nodded. Bishop continued morosely, "Junior has been a wild lad. My fault, too, I suppose; but I'll tan his hide when I get him this time. He forged a check for eight thousand dollars three days ago and I haven't seen him since. Of course, I had the check honored—but that isn't what's worrying me. Perhaps you've heard of these hit-and-run accidents up the road? I want you to take a look at my son's car. Somehow or other, he got it into the garage before he ran away."

Jeff whistled softly and motioned Hunk to follow. Hunk was crimson-faced trying to hold himself in. Finally, his tongue got the better of his brain. He blurted:

"Say, Mr. Bishop, we just saw another one of them accidents down the road. Guy was smeared all over the place. Busted to pieces. Better you shouldn't let your kid have a car. Kids shouldn't have cars, anyhow. They go nuts and——"

Hunk said *"Ow!"* and grimaced. Jeff's neatly-pointed shoe had connected with his shin. "Doggone," Hunk went on, "I never can keep my big mouth shut."

Bishop looked pale as they entered the garage. He snapped on the lights. There were three vehicles in the building, a suburban, a town car and a racy roadster. The roadster had the left front fender crumpled and the right headlight minus a section of its lens. There were smears on the bumper, and Jeff bent over them. He wet his forefinger and touched the stains.

"Blood," he said slowly. "Mr. Bishop—this car hit someone—hit him hard. I believe as you do—that your son killed one of those unfortunates along the highway. He lost his head and drove home. Possibly the poor kid went half crazy with remorse. Then fear crept in, as it usually does. He forged a check, took the money and high-tailed it. We'll find him, but I think it best that the police hear nothing of this. Don't have the car repaired, because they'll check every garage. When I find the boy, I'll talk him into giving himself up like a man."

Bishop sighed. "I hoped you'd say that." Then his eyes became grim. "But if Junior killed a man and fled, I won't interfere with justice. He'll take his medicine and like——

Hunk, near the garage doors, made a hissing sound between his teeth. "Boss, I think somebody's out there—in the bushes. Want me to have a look?"

"Wait," Jeff answered. "Mr. Bishop—stay here. Your son may have been living in the garage or some vacant place near by. If we scare him, he may get away."

JEFF slipped out the door, motioned Hunk to make a half circle of the east portion of the estate, and both men began moving forward cautiously. They heard the sound of running feet, steps that stumbled and betrayed the impelling fear that kept them going. A man's form appeared running from the road toward the garage. Jeff smiled grimly. Junior was coming back.

There was a rustling sound in the bushes. A second shadowy form appeared. A man with a wide-brimmed hat pulled down, coat collar turned up. Silhouetted against the light from the house, he looked like some gigantic bat intent on murder.

The figure's right hand darted out. A streak of flame followed by an explosion, and Jeff gasped in alarm. He dropped to a kneeling position and with the same movement, whipped a gun from his holster. Again that batlike form fired. The first figure slowed up, staggered sideways a few steps and collapsed.

"Stop!" Jeff yelled as the gunman streaked for the driveway. "Stop or I'll drop you!"

His answer came in the form of hot lead. The killer spun around, gun spitting. Jeff sighed and drew a bead on him. He pressed the trigger and as the gun blazed, he was on his feet like a sprinter, racing toward the killer.

He found him, sprawled on his back, arms outflung and the murder gun tightly clenched in his right hand. Jeff looked once and gulped. His slug had gone through the man's throat, making a messy job of it.

Hunk was already beside the body of the second man. Bishop came running from the garage. He looked and groaned. "That's my son. That's Junior. Who? What——"

"He's alive," Jeff said. "Badly wounded, but alive. Hunk—beat it into the house and phone for an ambulance. Step on it. Mr. Bishop—take a look at the man who shot your son. See if you know him."

Bishop turned away reluctantly. He walked over to where the dead man lay, took a quick look and became sick. Jeff didn't blame him. His .45 had made an awful mess.

BISHOP finally talked. "Never saw him before. Repulsive-looking creature. Why should he want to kill my son?"

Jeff was searching the man's clothing. In one pocket he found a roll of bills. He counted them swiftly, for they were hundred-dollar notes. There was two thousand dollars in that roll.

"This man," Jeff said, "is known as Hatchet-face Durham. He's a professional murderer at so much per kill and right on the line. Somebody paid him two grand to knock off your son."

Hunk returned and, at Jeff's orders, carefully picked up the wounded boy and carried him into the house. Young Bishop had two serious wounds, one high through the chest, the other perforating his side. Either one was apt to be fatal.

Bishop paced the floor, his eyes bloodshot. "Why anyone would pay a man to kill my son is beyond my comprehension. Do you think he'll—die?"

"I don't know. Frankly, it looks bad," Jeff said. The front door buzzer sounded—an eerie note in a still weirder setting. "Hunk—see who that is and be careful."

Hunk moved toward the door like a cat. He opened it with his left hand, while his right shot out and grabbed the caller by the throat. He lifted the man completely off his feet and held him, kicking and flailing, like a frightened puppy.

"That—that's Winant," Bishop gasped. "He's my attorney. Lives next door."

Hunk put the man down reluctantly and let him go. Winant glared at Hunk, looked with questioning eyes at Jeff, and then saw young Bishop gasping for breath and drooling blood from his parted lips.

"My God! Peter—what on earth? I heard shots—"

Bishop said, "Somebody tried to kill my son. These two men are detectives. The killer—is dead. Mr. Patrick shot him. Horrible!"

Winant sat down heavily while Bishop explained. Winant said, "Why in Heaven's name didn't you come to me, Peter? Or Junior—why didn't he ask my advice? I could get him out of this mess."

CHAPTER II.

FRIGHTENED MAN.

JEFF knelt again beside the boy and watched his breathing grow feeble, until the blood-smeared chest moved no more and the pulse under Jeff's thumb became still. The private detective's eyes grew icy, deadly. The ambulance howled up and an interne rushed into the house. He applied a stethoscope expertly, arose and sighed.

"Sorry. Nothing I can do. He's dead!"

The boy's father sat stony-eyed, stunned by the news.

Attorney Winant rumpled his hair and looked at Jeff. "Well—I guess it's up to you now."

"It is," Jeff snapped. "And I'm going to get the devils who are behind this. That boy was killed because he knew something. Mr. Bishop—who did your son pal around with? What spots did he frequent?"

"Wait a moment," Winant broke in. "I've a theory. Perhaps Junior did kill a man with his car. Isn't it possible that some relative of this victim might have arranged to kill Junior out of revenge?"

"Don't be a sap," Jeff derided. "Those dead men were all bums—tramps. Where'd they or their friends get two grand to pay off a rodman like Hatchet-face?"

Bishop sighed deeply. "You're right, Patrick. Junior fooled around with the other youngsters on this street. They frequented roadhouses all over the State, but especially the ones near by. Time and again I told him not to drink so much, but he wouldn't listen. Now look at him. His closest friend is young Giles. He lives at the end of the street."

Jeff went to the phone. He called the State police barracks, made a brief report, then phoned for the morgue wagon.

"I'm going to work on this, Mr. Bishop," he said. "You may not hear from me for a few days, but I'll be around."

"One moment," Winant broke in. "There should be some agreement as to fees. As Mr. Bishop's attorney and—"

Hunk moved forward. "Shall I poke him one, boss—just for luck? Lemme shove his teeth down his throat, huh?"

"Don't be a fool," Jeff snapped. "He's right. That's what lawyers are for." Jeff faced Bishop. "I'm more interested in landing the men behind Hatchet-face. Fees don't mean a thing now."

IN their car, Jeff pondered a few moments. "You're aching for a scrap, Hunk, and I'm going to satisfy that craving so you'll remember this night for months. But first, I'm going to see this lad who palled around with Junior. Drive to that house at the end of the street."

Hunk stayed in the car and Jeff ran up the steps of the big house. He punched the bell and a maid let him in. There were three people in the hallway. One was a boy about Junior's age. He was wan-looking and nervous. Beside him was a girl whose cheeks were tear-stained, her make-up a smear of color. Before them stood a man who must be their father.

All three regarded Jeff impatiently. Jeff decided not to beat around the bush. "I'm a detective ——" he began. Then things happened.

The boy gave a wild shriek of terror. He lunged for Jeff, pushed him out of the way and fled into the night. The girl turned deathly pale, staggered backward, to collapse with a moan.

"How did you get wind of this?" the elderly man demanded. "And why didn't you use more tact in coming here like this? I ought to ——" He stopped, wiped his face in a tired manner. "Oh, it's all right, officer! You're paid to do your duty, but you'll have to catch Jack first. How did you get wind of it?"

Jeff's eyes narrowed. He said slowly, "You mean of that hit-and-run case down the road, Mr. Giles?"

Giles turned ruddy. "He's not mixed up in that, too? Heavens, man, don't tell me he's wanted for anything like that? A forged check—that's wild oats—but killing a man is—"

Jeff watched the maid trying to bring Giles's daughter back to consciousness. The girl breathed spasmodically.

"Better get a doctor for her, Mr. Giles. This isn't an ordinary fainting spell. She's raving. I'll carry her upstairs."

It took him a few moments to accomplish this. The maid called a doctor and Jeff questioned Giles again.

"So your son forged a check? I didn't know anything about that. I came to question him about young Bishop's habits. Somebody killed Junior Bishop a few moments ago. I thought your son might know something—"

Giles toyed with a cigar, suddenly snapped it in half. "Maybe he does. That boy of mine hasn't been in his right mind lately. He's carried on, disobeyed me, threatened me, and then he forged that check—for eight thousand dollars. Bring him back by the seat of his pants, and I'll see that you're rewarded."

Jeff turned away sadly. He wondered if Giles's son would be brought home by the seat of his pants—or in an undertaker's wagon. Jeff went back to the car.

HUNK said, "I saw a young squirt come outa the house like he'd been shot from a gun. Maybe better I should 'a' stopped him, huh?"

"Forget it!" Jeff answered. "You'll have your fill of brawls. Drive along the highway and stop at the first roadhouse. We'll go inside separately. I'll hang around the bar. You walk in and start a fight. A good scrap, understand? Get yourself thrown out."

Hunk gaped, but he didn't ask questions. Jeff was riding with his eyes tightly closed, his forehead like a washboard. Hunk knew better than to break in on Jeff's trancelike attitude.

When Hunk pulled up in front of the Purple Inn roadhouse, Jeff gave him precise instructions, sauntered into the place and ordered a drink at the bar. Hunk came in five minutes later. His vest was unbuttoned, his tie crooked and he had a leering grin on his face. A waiter saw him and hurried to throw him out. One second later that waiter dangled from a big chandelier, clung to it with wild shrieks.

Someone shouted. Half a dozen waiters formed a wedge. The bartender picked up a bung starter, and all made a rush for Hunk. Jeff slipped around the bar, found steps leading downstairs and vanished. He was in the car when Hunk came flying out, to skid along the gravel. Hunk got up, dusted himself off and grinned broadly as he stepped into the car.

"There's four of 'em with busted noses, boss. I could 'a' knocked the whole bunch silly, only you says let 'em toss me out—so I did."

"Good. Now drive to the next place and pull the same racket. But don't get hurt, Hunk. I'm going to need those hams you call fists, before this mess is over."

The second and third roadhouses promptly ejected Hunk, and Jeff made his exploratory trips through the places unhindered. They stopped in front of the fourth joint—a palatial-looking place with a sign that sparkled like a huge gem. It said, "Flashing Diamond Inn."

JEFF went inside and surveyed the place. It was one of those elaborately-fitted dives patronized by the crazy kids of doting, wealthy parents. The dance floor was packed with them, some half drunk. Jeff stopped beside a vacant table. A soft voice at his elbow startled him.

"A table, *m'sieu?*"

Jeff grinned at the waiter. That "*m'sieu*" was probably the only word of French he knew. The man fitted his tuxedo like a fat man in a size No. 14 bathing suit. He bulged all over the edges.

"No—just dropped in for a drink. The bar will do, thanks."

The waiter pointed out the glass-and-chromium bar. Jeff ordered a side car and parted with a dollar for it. Jeff ogled the bartender.

"This Snorky Jones's place?" he asked.

The bartender finished wiping a glass. "Never heard of the guy. This joint belongs to Nicky Ricardo, mister, and we don't like too damn many nosey people in here."

There was a shout from the front of the place. The orchestra stopped. Waiters appeared as if by prearranged signal. The bartender curled his fist around an empty bottle and vaulted the bar. Jeff watched the fireworks for a minute.

Hunk, apparently raging drunk, stood with his back against the wall. A waiter was draped over a chair and every time he tried to squirm off, Hunk slapped him across the back. The kids were yelling encouragement; the waiters silent and efficient. They closed around Hunk. Jeff watched the big man toss two of them across a table before he darted behind the bar.

When Jeff emerged through a garage door at the rear of the place, he wore a satisfied smile. Hunk came flying out on schedule, but this time his face looked like raw beef. He sucked bloody knuckles and grinned.

"Nice going, huh? Some one of these days I'm comin' back to this dump and show them boys what a red-hot scrap is like. Hey, boss—it's a dirty trick makin' me let them gorillas throw me out on my ear. I could handle all of 'em put together!"

"Hunk," Jeff said, "I've got some more excitement for you. We're going to the morgue."

"Who's dead?" Hunk wanted to

know. "And say—that morgue ain't in my class. Ain't no fun there."

They stopped in front of the somber brick building. Jeff got out, directed:

"You drive to Giles's place and convince him his daughter is in danger. Stay with her every doggone minute, understand? If anything happens to her, I'll personally kick you in the pants until you'll stand for your meals for a mouth. Remember—this is serious. Tell Giles— But no"—Jeff shook his head dubiously—"that won't do! Giles would shoot you on sight. Hunk—you look like something between a raw hamburger and a hot dog. I'll phone Giles first, so he won't sick his dogs on you. Now scram!"

CHAPTER III.

MURDER INN.

JEFF identified himself to the morgue attendants and spent more than an hour examining the clothing taken from the hit-and-run victims during the past month. On each, he found a few tiny particles of pink substance exactly like that on the clothing of the man who had died earlier the same night.

"Got autopsy records handy?" Jeff asked.

He got them and made a close study. One significant item stood out. Each of these victims—tramps without a cent in their pockets—had eaten a heavy, rich meal shortly before they were killed.

Jeff phoned Giles's house again and got Hunk on the wire. "Everything O. K.? . . . Good! Stay there all night . . . and don't sleep. Tomorrow put someone else on the job. . . . Giles, himself, if you can. Then drive to the corner of Worthington Road and Highway 30. Park there until something happens."

Hunk was there on time. He was slumped behind the wheel dozing. Someone tapped him on the shoulder and he awoke with a jerk. He rubbed his eyes and scowled. There was a hobo grinning at him. A hobo who needed a shave, a new suit, new shoes and plenty of water on his hands and neck before he'd even begin to look clean.

"Scram," Hunk barked. "Go on—beat it before I wipe up the road with you."

"That," the hobo said, "is a hell of a way to treat your boss!"

"Jeff! For the lovamike what's the idea? Say—you aimin' to get yourself knocked off like them other bums?"

"Never mind what I plan to do," Jeff said. "Drive me about a mile from the Flashing Diamond. Then go back to Giles's and watch that girl. Her brother didn't show up?"

"Naw. And her old man walks around like he's half nuts. The girl clams up and acts crazy, too. Say, boss, can't you take me with you? I ain't cut out to sit around watching a dame."

"Let anything happen to that girl," Jeff promised, "and you'll be in bed, too—guarded by nurses! I'll see you tonight."

Jeff tramped the rest of the way to the Flashing Diamond. It looked deserted and dead during the daytime. He hobbled around to the back and knocked on the screen door. A burly, sour-looking man looked out.

"I'm willin' to work fer some chow," Jeff said meekly. "I kin wash dishes or chop wood, an' I'm hungry."

The screen door opened, the burly man smiled—at least, that's what he'd call it.

"You gotta see the boss first, but

I think he'll fix you up. The boss usta be a bo hisself once, pal, and he likes guys like you, see?"

JEFF followed the man down a staircase to a door set in a concrete wall. He stepped into an ornately furnished studio office. Behind the big desk sat a dark-featured man with a trim mustache and gold earrings that dangled from the lobes of his ears. He looked up, scowled, and then nodded approvingly.

"Looking for work, bo? Swell—I need a guy. Rocco—toss a good feed in him and put him to work washing dishes. You can stay the night, bo. We'll fix you a good room."

Jeff said, "T'anks, mate. A bed sure will feel nice."

Jeff ate a hearty meal of left-overs. Then he mounted a high stool and bent over what seemed to be a million dishes. He washed until his hands felt raw. Rocco tapped his shoulder and motioned him to follow. Jeff got down wearily and dried his hands. He was escorted into a well-lighted room.

"Stay here," Rocco ordered. "I'll be back."

Jeff sat down. He rubbed his nose, eased off one shoe and massaged his foot as tramps often do. For Jeff had an uncanny idea that he was being watched. The room was too brilliantly lighted and the silence too intense—as though all operations had ceased while he was being surveyed. He knew his disguise was good—it had passed Hunk—yet Jeff was doubtful. He hadn't changed his build nor altered his features to any great extent, depending on the fact that the chances of meeting someone he knew would be slim.

Rocco came back in half an hour. His eyes were beady, his lips compressed.

"Boss says you did a good day's work," he reported. "So you can have a snooze for yourself. You'll have to work late, so you'll need rest."

The bed was soft, the room comfortable; only there were no windows in it and when Jeff tried the door very gently, he found it was locked. An hour went by and soon Jeff heard the blare of an orchestra. The spot was getting hot for the night.

He climbed up on a chair and unscrewed the electric light bulb, for there seemed to be no switch in the room. Then he lay down on the bed, turned over several times to make the springs groan and finally he began to breathe steadily, loudly. After a few moments of this, he carefully swung his feet off the bed and tiptoed to the door. He pressed an ear against the panels.

Certain he wasn't being guarded, Jeff drew keys from his pocket and studied the lock. He opened it gently and looked out into the hall. Before he left, he relocked the door and stole toward the end of the corridor.

He reached the cellar without interference. The waiters were all busy in the dining room; Nicky Ricardo and his hoods were apparently in a bull session in his office. Jeff took a quick look into a narrow, one-car garage, leading off the basement. It had an amazingly long runway and the kind of doors that rolled up like an old-fashioned desktop. The walls were painted a gaudy pink, and they were of stucco.

JEFF paused, head cocked to one side, and he listened. Someone was rhythmically banging a piece of metal against more metal. It came from the depths of the cellar and he made for the spot.

"Hey," someone said gruffly, "who is it?"

Jeff merely turned halfway around and hugged the wall behind several stacked kegs of beer. A man, a gun in his fist, came cautiously toward him.

Jeff leaped, fist swinging. He connected beautifully and eased the guard to the floor, rolled him behind the kegs of beer and picked up the gun. Jeff bent over the man. He swung the gun hard.

He found a steel door with a tiny grille-work set high in it. The door was padlocked on the outside. Jeff stood on tiptoe to peer in. He wasn't surprised at all, for he had fully expected to find young Jack Giles inside.

Jeff Patrick examined the padlock, glanced at his bunch of keys and knew he had none to fit. He returned to the guard, searched him swiftly and swore. Nicky must be keeping the keys himself, to insure his prisoner's safety.

There was no time to lose. If Rocco entered Jeff's room, found him gone, his whole plan would tumble like a house of cards. Young Giles would have to manage, somehow. Jeff sped back upstairs, slowed down as he passed along the corridor and barely avoided meeting Rocco. Two and a half minutes later Jeff was inside his room, sprawled on the bed and apparently sound asleep.

More hours went by. The din from the dance floor grew by the minute. The orchestra kept pace with it, at first, but not even "Tiger Rag," played by half a dozen blaring trumpets, could drown out the racket those crazy kids were making.

He heard a key turn in the door. Jeff didn't move. Someone shook him. He opened his eyes, rubbed them and stared up at Rocco.

"Come on, bo. Got some more work for you. Say—we treat you pretty damn nice, eh?"

"Swell," Jeff said. "Yeah, chief, I ain't never been in a better place."

AS he spoke, Jeff looked over Rocco's shoulder. They were approaching the door. With all the lights out in the room and only a dim one going in the hall, Jeff found himself in luck. There was a shadow against the farther wall—the spectral image of a man who held something above his head, ready to strike.

As he stepped out of the room, Jeff heard the swish of a blackjack. He rolled with the blow, took it with bended knees, to stem its full fury. But when he sagged in a heap on the floor, it wasn't all pretense. Jeff was half out.

"Pick him up," Rocco ordered. "Step on it, before some nosey kid shows and we have to smear him, too! Drag this bo down to the garage and give him the works. Nicky and me are gonna take care of the rest. You guys know what to do. Toss him in the back of the old bus and lug him out on the road. Everything is set. We got the dame, too, and it's gonna look swell!"

Then Rocco stepped over him and kicked him savagely.

"Imagine this phony dick thinkin' he had us fooled? We'll show the dumbbell how Rocco treats mugs like him. Listen, boys—do it kinda slow. I'll tell the orchestra to pep things up in case he yells."

Jeff's heart really sank into the depths of his tattered shoes now. They even knew his identity. No wonder the mob had gotten away with it for so long a time. There were brains behind them—uncanny brains.

Someone searched him, extracted the gun he'd taken from the guard.

Jeff had another run of bad luck. They also found the tiny automatic he had concealed under his clothes.

Rocco laughed unpleasantly. "So he slugged Red in the cellar? O. K.! I'm gonna go with him to see nothin' funny happens. The boss'll kill me if this mug ever gets away."

CHAPTER IV.

HUNK GOES TO TOWN.

JEFF let himself go utterly limp as he was carried to the cellar. Someone opened the door of the narrow garage and he was hurled through space. He landed, rolled over twice and lay on his stomach, his head flat against the concrete floor, but his slitted eyes riveted on the rolling garage door.

He heard the rollers squeal. Cool air swept in. He carefully put the palms of his hands against the floor, tensed every muscle. A car hummed, tires grated against cinders and he saw the radiator of a heavy machine maneuver its way through the doorway. It barely fitted the narrow garage. There was no room to flatten one's self against the sidewalls; no way of escaping the metal monster now straightening out for the final spurt that would grind him to death against the pink stucco wall.

Rocco, from his perch at the head of the steps, shouted, "Do it slow. This guy's a lousy dick. Bust his damned back for him."

The car's headlights were turned on. The motor picked up speed. Then the murderer behind the wheel let up on the clutch. The car came like a gigantic battering-ram.

Jeff leaped to his feet and with what seemed to be the same impulse, vaulted high into the air. His feet landed on the bumper of the car, his body draped itself over the hot radiator. But he didn't stay there long. Rocco fired twice and missed. The car slammed into the concrete wall with a grinding of crumpled fenders and smashing headlamps. Jeff squirmed across the car, reached the window in time to see it roll down and the man inside try to get to work with a gun.

As the weapon was shoved out, Jeff grabbed it. A single wrench, and he ripped it free. Rocco was firing again. Jeff turned his cramped body and snapped one shot, put a prayer behind it and saw Rocco make a nose-dive off the steps.

Jeff thrust the weapon into the car and jerked the trigger. The driver wilted. Jeff pushed him out of the way. Another of Nicky's hoods was getting set to shoot. Jeff fired at him, missed, but scared the guy so that he ducked obligingly.

Jeff couldn't get the car door open, because the wall was too close. He blessed his luck in being slender as he wriggled through the window. He maneuvered himself into position behind the wheel, rolled up the window and grinned when a slug cobwebbed the glass, proving it was bulletproof.

Jeff threw the car into reverse. Two men, trying to reach him from the rear, bleated in alarm. One of them was knocked down. He didn't get up. The other limped away, roaring with pain.

Jeff spun the wheel, nosed the car through the yard and around the side of the building. He had only one headlight and that carried no lens, but Jeff had to take his chances. He passed the intersection of Route 40-B and eased up. They'd stage the "accident" within the next mile or two. Damn it—if he only had headlights, he could pick out the murder car easily and be prepared, but now all he could do was trust to luck.

He jammed on the brakes suddenly and pulled off the road. At the brow of a hill, he could see a car parked and men around it. Jeff leaped out, hit the woods lining the highway.

HE reached the top of the grade, dropped flat and watched. There was a weak moon, but enough for him to see two inert figures carried out of the car and deposited somewhere in the high grass down a ravine. Jeff crept forward.

Someone groaned. Jeff dropped flat and wriggled through the grass, grateful now that it was so tall. He reached out and his hands touched soft skin. He raised himself slightly. Gloria and Jack Giles lay before him. They were cruelly tied and gagged.

Jeff patted Gloria's face, whispered a word of courage and went on. Alone, he had to tackle at least four men—all killers, all eager to see him die. They'd fight it out to the last man, too, because capture would mean the chair. A whole police squad would have had trouble, and here was Jeff, crawling on his belly like an earthworm, to the attack.

One thought dominated him. Hunk was probably dead, and Hunk wouldn't rest well if his murderers roamed the world as free men.

Jeff took a bold chance. He stood up, crouching, surveying the car where the hoods sat waiting for Rocco to bring their third victim. Suddenly, a streak of orange flame jerked from the car and lead all but parted Jeff's hair. He dropped heavily.

"Somebody's out there," Nicky yelled. "Fan out, you guys, and get him. It looked like that dick. Get him or we all travel the hot route."

Then he saw Nicky's ruse. The car backed around until it was well off the road and at the edge of a sharp drop. Then the headlights were flared down and they revealed Gloria and Johnny Giles in their glare.

To save those two kids, Jeff would have to expose himself to the gunfire from the car. If he didn't, they'd kill the two youngsters. Jeff balanced the gun in his fist and pondered his chances of charging the car in the face of the spitting guns. He decided the time wasn't quite ripe for suicide.

A car might come along at any time, but even that, Jeff realized, would be practically hopeless. Because if he tried to attract attention, Nicky would order the execution of those two kids exposed by the headlights, and yet concealed from the view of any motorist who happened to pass along the highway.

Then, of all the craziest things he ever heard, Jeff stood riveted to the spot by an Indian war whoop. And that was exactly what it must be, for nothing else could make that noise. It came from across the highway and behind the murderers' car. Intermingled with the howls was a jargon of words.

Jeff's face broke into a grin. He leaped into the air, heedless of the shots that came from the murder car. Those within hadn't heard the war whoops.

"Draw — *whooo-hooo* — their — *whooo-hooo*—fire—*whooo-hooo*—"

IT was Hunk. Between the astounding whoops he was telling Jeff to keep the crooks busy. Jeff pumped a bullet at the car. A fusillade of hot lead raked the grass. A few slugs came dangerously close. Then Nicky lost his head. The guns were turned on Gloria and Johnny. Jeff emitted a groan and charged across the clearing, straight toward the car. He had to draw their fire before they got the range on those kids.

Then Jeff saw something amazing. The murderers' car seemed to lift itself into the air, poise on two wheels a moment while those within screeched in terror. The heavy car swayed, toppled, went plunging into the ravine.

Hunk, as big as a house, stood up in the road, flexing his muscles.

"Hey—boss—was that somethin' or was that somethin'? I was on my way to the joint and I spotted this set-up."

"That was," Jeff agreed, "somethin'! This way, Hunk, you old war horse. Gloria and her brother are tied up down there. I'm praying they're not dead."

They weren't, but Jeff had never seen two more frightened youngsters. He untied them. Hunk picked up the girl and trotted down the hill toward the car Jeff had stolen from the Flashing Diamond. He rode at top speed toward the brow of the hill. There, Jeff and Hunk slid down the ravine, found the murder car and succeeded in opening one door. Nicky was hunched in a corner, his neck oddly twisted and his eyes staring open. An undertaker would have to close them. Two other crooks were alive, but unconscious. The fourth had been drilled neatly through the top of the head. Jeff's blind shooting had obtained results.

Fifteen minutes later Jeff, Hunk, Gloria and Jack staggered into the big house. Giles, Senior, leaped to his feet. He alternately embraced Gloria and socked Jack on the extreme rear of his pants.

Attorney Winant arose from a chair in front of the fireplace. He came forward with extended hands. "Patrick," he said fervently, "this is a grand night's work. When Gloria disappeared, we thought you and this elephantine assistant of yours were in league with the crooks."

Jeff grinned. His hands came from behind his back. There was a click. Winant stared down at handcuffs embracing his wrists.

"Now, my dear barrister," Jeff said in an outraged voice, "you should know we couldn't be in with Nicky and his bunch of hoods. Why—you wouldn't permit us to join the mob, would you? Or am I wrong?"

WINANT turned deathly pale. "I—I don't know what—you mean!"

"Then I'll tell you." Jeff flopped into a chair. He helped himself to a cigar, lit it and rubbed the fake whiskers on his face.

"Funny, isn't it, Winant, how Nicky suddenly recognized me at his roadhouse? Especially when he'd never seen me before—nor any of his mob, either, so far as they knew. Funny, too, that even with such a swell disguise as I'm wearing now, you knew me for Jeff Patrick when even Gloria—or Jack—or their father can't recognize me. Why?

"You made a long study of me, Winant, while I was in a well-lighted room and you had your eyes glued to some hole in the wall. Tonight you planned to kill me—make it look as though young Giles and his sister had struck me with their car. Then I suppose your men would have wrecked the car, killed those two kids and made it look like one big accident."

"But I don't understand," Giles stepped forward. "Are you Jeff Patrick?"

Jeff nodded. "Ask my assistant. Winant is the man behind this murder business. Here's how they worked it: First they studied the kids who frequented the roadhouse. They chose a likely subject to work on. Then they picked up some poor old bum, fed him well and shoved him into a narrow garage where they killed him by running a car against his body. They took a corpse out to the highway, waited until one of these kids drove by and threw the cadaver under the wheels of the car."

"Then I—d-didn't kill that man?" Gloria Giles cried eagerly. "I—I didn't kill him?"

"You did not," Jeff said. "And to your brother, my apologies. He was taking the rap for you by saying he drove the car. Anyway—Nicky always trailed behind the kids. When they stopped to see what they hit, he gave them some good advice—to scram and he'd take care of things. Half drunk, thoroughly frightened, the kids were only too willing to oblige. But then—ah, then Nicky would say somebody else saw it happen and wanted a few grand to keep their mouths closed! The result? Those poor kids forged checks and turned the cash over to Nicky. A swell racket. Humane and filled with the milk of human kindness—like burning down an old ladies' home and shooting the inmates as they run out."

"But Winant?" Giles favored the attorney with a sour look. "How is he mixed up?"

"I saw Winant," Jack Giles said quickly. "He told me to pay up. It would be better than going to prison for twenty years."

"And poor Junior Bishop," Jeff went on steadily; "he died because he refused to steal any more money from his father. He escaped Nicky, I suppose, and fled. He was on the loose for hours, sopping up booze and trying to forget. All the while Nicky and Hatchet-face Durham were hiding near the kid's house. Waiting—waiting until he showed."

Hunk came back from telephoning the State police. Jeff explained the case for their benefit, when they arrived a few moments later.

"I GOT my first tip, lieutenant, from that dead man you showed me on the road last night. His clothes showed traces of pink stucco—as though the stuff had been driven into the cloth. I checked on the other hit-and-run victims and found the same thing. Nicky Ricardo's spot was the only place that had a garage with pink stucco walls, so it had to be him."

Jeff marched toward the door. "Hunk," he said tensely, "how come that girl got away from you?"

"He couldn't help it," Gloria cried. "One of Nicky's men looked in the window—signaled me that I had to follow or he'd tell. I—I slipped out when the detective was dozing. He'd been awake all night."

"O. K., Jeff said. "I promised him something if he let you escape. It's coming—but later."

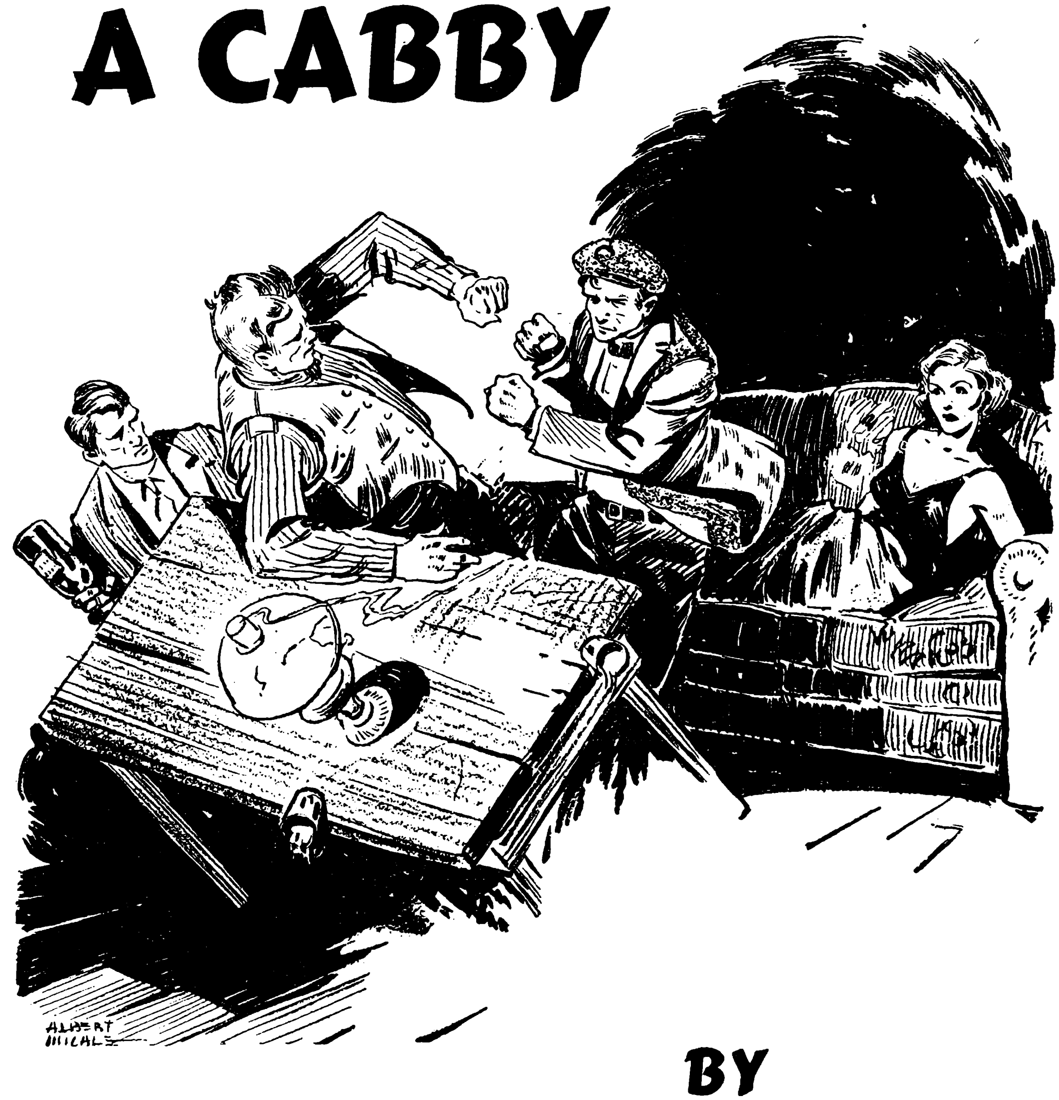
They rode back in silence, both men tired. As they passed the Flashing Diamond, Hunk tramped on the brake. He backed up, opened the door of the car and darted across into the roadhouse.

Ten minutes later, he came out, dusting his hands. All windows in the place were smashed. Three waiters lay in a heap outside the door. The bartender was curled up in a corner with the picture of a nude draped around his neck. Every bottle behind the bar was smashed and the place reeked of whisky.

Hunk grinned, rubbed his face and suddenly he bent over forward, pulled up his coat. "O. K., boss. I'll take it right now. Boy, it's worth it!"

Red Regan picks up one of his strangest fares when

MURDER HAILS A CABBY



BY
NED O'DOHERTY

Murder Hails A Cabby

CHAPTER I.

WITNESS TO MURDER.

I COULD see the guy's every move in my rear-view mirror. He was bent low, sneaking up like a rat, with an ice pick in his hand. I sat there, grinding my teeth, until he stooped to go to work on my tires. Then I was out of the seat like a flash, skirting round to the back.

The mug had the pick up against one of my newest tires, and was about to slip it in. I said, "Hey!" and he jerked up his head so that his thick jaw was at a perfect angle. I bent and brought a lightning uppercut from the pavement, almost ripping the lad's head from his shoulders. He crashed against the rear of my cab and bounced off, to land flat on his face in the gutter.

I was gathering him up for another whack, when two of his hacky pals came tearing in my direction. I hesitated, mainly because they both held ugly-looking jack handles. I had tried to fight a jack handle once before, and came out second best. This time I used more sense. I snapped:

"Hold it, chiselers! This bum got his for trying to needle my tires."

"Oh, yeah?" barked a guy with a lot of nose. "Buckers* who pull on this private hack line always get needled.** Only now, you get the lumps besides!"

They started to move in again, and I felt ice around my spine. If I didn't think fast—

"Be dopy," I snapped. "Fracture the skull of the kid brother of Bill Regan and see what it wins you!"

The crack stopped them cold. I followed up the advantage by nodding at my hack. "You can check the name against the identification card inside."

They checked all right, and from then on the hack line was mine. Bill's name was like magic. It didn't please me overmuch, because in my opinion, Bill was just a lucky blubber. Not a nice way to feel about a brother, I guess; but that's the way it was. Of course, Bill had built up quite a rep in Homicide, but that was where his luck came in. Luck plays a big part in any game, and that goes for the detecting business, too.

Up until now, I had been the cruising type of cabby. Which means that I kept rolling, picking up a call here and there. It was a tough way to make a living, putting a daily sixty or seventy miles on the dinger* in the world's worst traffic. I got fed up, which was why I decided to bust in on the Club Vanity line.

Within a week, I was acquainted with everybody, including Kitty the hat-check girl. I got to dropping inside the club, just to kid that cute blonde along. In her particular case, blonde and dumbness didn't go together. She refused to believe I wanted to take her out just for her company.

I had just got another "No!" and was pretending to sulk. Joe Robinson, the manager, gave me the bad eye; but I ignored the guy. I knew as well as he that if I wasn't Red Gegan, I wouldn't be hanging round the swanky Club Vanity.

AS usual, the club was doing a land-office business. Everybody who was anybody made their way into John Harmond's café at some time or another. The answer was simple.

**Buckers*—Drivers from rival firms who try to cut in on another stand.

*** Needling*—Deflating tires.

**Dinger*—Cabby's slang for the clock which registers cost of ride.

Harmond knew how to run a first-class club, and the prices outdid the place. I was trying to figure his take for an evening, when my attention was attracted by an unusually loud racket over by the bar.

The band was swinging, and the café society was trying to "truck," but making a mess of the nutty dance. But the two noisy lads at the bar weren't interested in music. They were waving their arms wildly and bursting out in spasmodic roars of unrefined laughter. Also, they were flirting brazenly with all available females, and the gentlemen friends of same didn't appear to be enjoying themselves. I had an idea trouble wasn't far off, and took a quick glance in Joe Robinson's direction.

Joe was pretending to be in conversation at a table on the other side of the dance floor, but his dark eyes were on the trouble makers. Joe was handsome and tough at the same time, and usually rushed hoodlums in a hurry. I figured he was taking it easy because John Harmond and his pretty wife were at a table over against the wall.

The noise at the bar got louder and succeeded in annoying Harmond. He lifted his chin and Robinson got going. He came weaving between tables, his broad shoulders swinging as he made time. He was about halfway to the bar when one of the loud fellows tried to drag a pretty girl away from her boy friend. The boy friend had shoulders. He put their full power behind a beautiful right cross. It connected flush on the button.

The other mug jumped forward to help his friend. Someone crowned him with a highball glass. One thing led to another. In no time at all, everybody was throwing punches at the most available chins.

Robinson was struggling to reach the bar, and making little progress. A wine bottle missed his head by a scant inch, went on to pick the fancy bar mirror from its moorings. The band was making plenty of noise, but running a poor second to the screaming ladies.

A big goof came fast in my direction, knocking a woman flat as he dived for the door. I started a haymaker for his cowardly jaw, but it never landed. The lights went out, ruining my aim.

Scraping sounds told me that most of the café society was going under the tables. Best place for a gang of yellowbellies, I was thinking, when a wild swing caught me in back of the neck. That put yours truly under a table in quick order, delighted to find a vacancy.

Gunshots were like sharp cracks of thunder. I watched them bite red chunks out of the darkness. A moment of silence, then a woman's scream vibrated the length of the room. Light jumped out of the ceiling and a sea of white faces grew slowly out of the floor.

I swung red hair out of my eyes and took a peek. The sight wasn't pretty. Nice people were acting Canal-Street-subwayish. The band had gone out with the tide. Robinson had finally reached the bar, but the trouble makers had disappeared. Joe was talking earnestly to Joan Gleason. Joan was the dream-girl type. Besides, she had nice curves and wore clothes that didn't hide them.

The girl had her back to the bad and didn't seem to be listening to Robinson. Joe grabbed her arm and swung her round toward him. Then he glanced downward and seemed to stiffen. Quickly, he bent and was up, pushing something into his pocket. I began to wonder about that, but was interrupted.

"The man's dead! It's murder!" The voice sent a chill up my spine.

THE crowd was around the spot where John Harmond and his wife had been sitting. I started forward fast. This was tough. Harmond was a good egg; always tipped me a half buck when he rode my hack. I dived through the crowd and got a surprise. Harmond was standing there, pale, but quite alive. His wife, Rose, was on a cushioned seat against the wall,, her eyes closed on the sight before her.

The young fellow on the floor was long and blondish. A girl, on her knees beside him, was wailing for "Freddie" to come back. It was a waste of breath. Freddie had a big bullet hole dead center between his eyes.

John Harmond looked ten years older than his fifty, and with good cause. His table had been directly behind that of the dead blond boy. He spotted me and tried to put lightness into his voice.

"Hello, Red. Looks like business for that big brother of yours."

I let that slide and said out of the side of my mouth, coplike: "Who did it, Harmond?"

The guy grinned at me. "Those drunks, sonny. Who else?"

I felt like pasting him for that "sonny" crack. Bad enough having Bill call me "kid," but when total strangers began taking liberties— A sudden idea crowded anger from my thoughts.

"The Vanity's been pulling a lot of Jake Adare's swell customers. Could it be that he got tired of looking at a lot of empty tables in his place?" Jake owned the "Oasis."

Harmond's grin evaporated and two lines jumped between his brows.

"No, Red. Murder is an expensive method of eliminating competition."

A waiter came by with a drink, and Harmond took it, put it to his wife's lips. She coughed, opened her eyes, pushed his arm away. The push wasn't gentle.

"They could have been aiming at you," I was saying. "And the blond guy standing up at the wrong moment—"

"You're nuts, cabby!" Harmond bit off, and his wife jerked to her feet.

She was still beautiful, but even her expertly applied make-up could not completely obliterate that fortyish look. Her voice was a hoarse whisper:

"You're both wrong! Those bullets were intended for me!"

That swelled-headed brother of mine came through the door like a Mack truck. His two homely sidekicks, Wing and Darcy, were at his heels; but they weren't seen with the two hundred pounds of bulk leading the way. Bill charged people from his path, stopped short when he spotted me.

"The kid, eh? How you ever make a buck in that hack racket is beyond me. You're always hanging around places."

I could feel temper coming out through my ears. My face twisted into the toughest shape I could think of, and my forefinger tapped on his barrel chest.

"NOW, listen—" I began, and that was as far as I got.

Bill grabbed my arm and swung me to one side without any apparent effort. I tried pulling loose, and got another yank for my trouble. When we were out of earshot of the others, he said:

"Let's have it, Red. Right from the beginning. And if you forget a single thing, you'll be minus a hack license in the morning."

That was him all over. Threats, anything to gain his point. I glanced at his fat pan. I saw enough to tell me he meant it about the license. What could I do? I gave him the story, finishing with:

"Everybody's here, except the lads who started things. They were gone when the lights came on."

"How about the rod?"

I lifted my shoulders. "No see."

Bill yelled for Wing, said: "Heard a couple of rod men breezed into town from Detroit, Al. Get a description of the two mugs who started the trouble here. It's just possible they're the Detroit cuties." He barked at me:

"Outside, kid, and stand by with your load.* I may use it, but that doesn't mean you're to charge me waiting time.** Get the idea?"

"There's a brother for you. Don't charge him waiting time, but stand by. If there were many guys like him around, cabbies would starve to death in quick order.

At three fifteen a. m. he bounced out and headed for my hack like he owned it. Before he got his foot on the running board, I had the flag*** down.

He gave me a narrow look, said, "Headquarters," and flopped on the seat just behind the dinger, the better to watch it, I guess.

I went sarcastic. "All you have to do now is grab a couple of Detroit gorillas and the case is solved. Then tomorrow, the phony headlines will scream how Bill Regan, the famous detective—"

"Pipe down!" said Bill. "It mayn't be so easy. I have an idea Jake Adare might be mixed in this. Dope is the guy's real racket, and the Oasis was a swell cover for handing it out. But the Vanity has been lifting a lot of his fancy customers. Maybe he got sore and sent those hoods over to get Harmond. That yokel getting it instead could have been an accident."

I was making faces at myself in the windshield. Bill was stealing my stuff almost thought for thought. I was beginning to think he could read my mind. I changed the subject in an effort to throw him off.

"You mean Harmond was cutting in on Adare's dope trade?"

"I do not," Bill said. "Harmond is too smart a businessman to fool with that stuff. It was a plain case of customer-stealing."

"You know that Harmond's wife is nutty over Joe Robinson?"

Bill grimaced. "You going in for keyhole snooping, Red?"

"Rose Harmond said she thought those slugs were meant for her," I snapped. "But maybe that don't mean anything to you."

Bill was suddenly straight in his seat, all interest. I liked having him that way, and followed it up.

"Joan Gleason is also gone on the same guy; and with both ladies in the place, murder could easily happen—"

"You think Joan pegged those shots at the Harmond woman?" Bill's fingers were digging into my arm.

"Couldn't be sure," I told him. "Only Joan was at the bar all evening, drinking plenty and looking daggers at Rose Harmond. Rose had taken Joe Robinson from Joan and it could be—" I broke off.

"How about the lights going out and the fight at the bar?" Bill demanded. "Could little Joan have arranged all that? And I suppose she

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**Load*—A cabby's reference to the taxi he drives.

** *Waiting time*—While waiting, a taxi clock continues to register.

*** *Flag*—The arm which is thrown to down position when a fare enters.

swallowed the rod, so it wouldn't be found?"

Mention of the gun sent more thoughts flashing through my brain. I half turned. "Just remembered something. Right after the shooting, I saw Robinson pick up something from the floor near Joan's feet. I didn't see it, but—"

"You dummy!" roared Bill. "Why didn't you spill this sooner? Get this hack around fast. Robinson's in the Sheldon Apartments!"

CHAPTER II.

TOO NOSEY.

THE Sheldon was tall, gray-faced, with steel-framed windows. There was a switchboard in the lobby, but no operator at this hour. We rode the automatic elevator to the fifth floor and went down a carpeted corridor to a door marked 508. Bill unholstered his .38 and pushed it into his coat pocket. He put his thumb on the bell button; when the door started to open, he helped it along with his shoulder.

Robinson bounced off the inside wall and swore loudly. Bill started to move in, but Joe stopped him with a neat right clip to the chin. I should have been tickled, but wasn't. Many a time I felt like trying out a hook or two on that brother of mine; but when some other lug took such liberties, the brotherly-love business won out.

I wanted to throw punches, and Bill was in the way. He tried a right and left which Robinson stopped easily with his arms.

Joe was no slouch. He proved it by almost lifting Bill from the floor with a hard uppercut. Bill staggered out of my way. I scored with a lightning one-two, and Robinson's knees buckled. Before he could snap out of it, Bill had the bracelets on him.

We went down a short hall that emptied into a lighted living room. Bill threw Robinson halfway across the room, to bounce up and down on a divan. Bill followed up, digging out his "jack." He leaned over the club manager.

"Either I get the rod that killed that hick, or I beat your brains out right here and now!"

"You rotten flatfoot!" Joe spat out, and Bill let him have his open palm flush across the mouth.

Robinson's eyes were bulging in his head, but he wasn't looking at Bill. Bill and I turned at the same time. Rose Harmond was framed in the bedroom door. She was smiling, but there was no mirth to it. Her hand came from behind her back holding a revolver. She held it out, butt-first.

"I found this hidden under Joe Robinson's mattress. I believe it is the gun you are looking for."

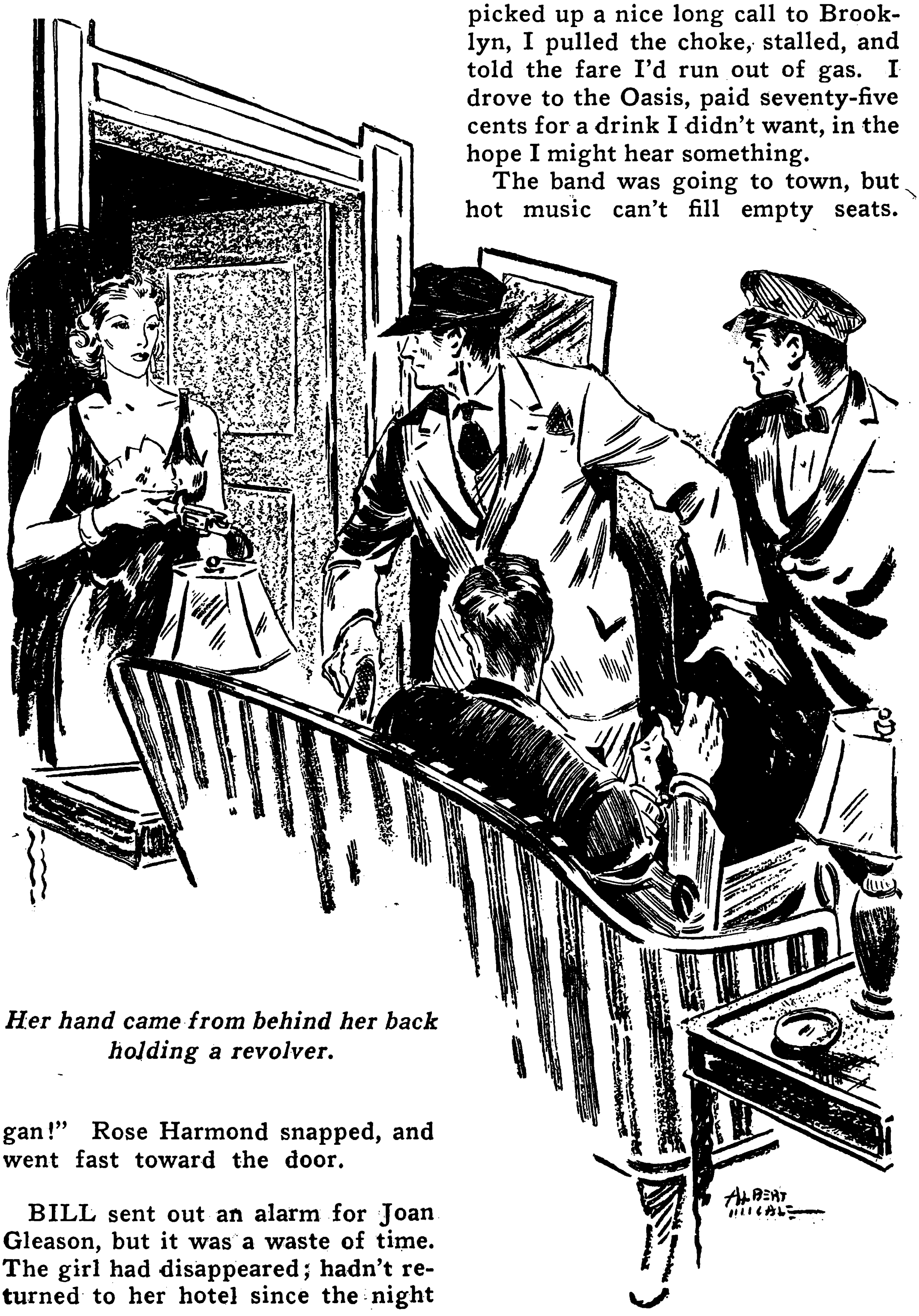
Bill went over and took the revolver from her outstretched hand. "Thanks, Mrs. Harmond. I feel certain Ballistics will show that the bullet in that blond kid came from this."

Rose Harmond came across the room, dragging her evening wrap along the floor. She stopped before Robinson and let him see the hate that was in her eyes. She said without moving her thin lips:

"You rotten double-crosser! You knew that hussy tried to kill me, and you try to cover her by hiding the gun. After all I've done for you!"

"Done for me!" Robinson roared. "Threw yourself at me under your husband's nose and made me like it, if I wanted to continue being manager of the Vanity. You broke it up for Joan and me, the only girl I ever cared about. It's too bad her aim was bad tonight, but when my chance comes—" His voice trailed off, died in his throat.

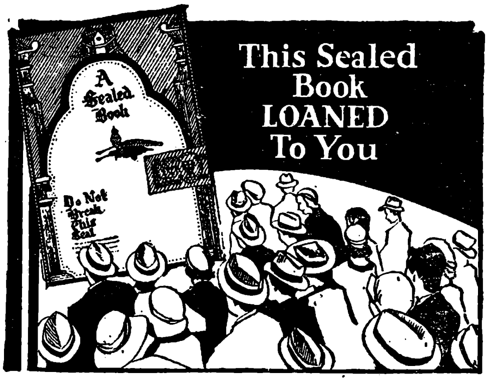
"You heard him threaten me, Regan!" Rose Harmond snapped, and went fast toward the door.



Her hand came from behind her back holding a revolver.

BILL sent out an alarm for Joan Gleason, but it was a waste of time. The girl had disappeared; hadn't returned to her hotel since the night of the murder. I was so wrapped up in the case that I was neglecting my cab business. Even when I picked up a nice long call to Brooklyn, I pulled the choke, stalled, and told the fare I'd run out of gas. I drove to the Oasis, paid seventy-five cents for a drink I didn't want, in the hope I might hear something.

The band was going to town, but hot music can't fill empty seats.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Jake Adare came out of his private office, spotted me and trotted over to the bar.

"Hello, Red," he greeted. "How's hacking?"

I looked him over in the bar mirror. He had a bullet head, a bloated face, and eyes about the size of green peas. When his subway mouth split in a grin, the dog ears had to be moved back out of the way. I have no use for dope peddlers, and Adare had such a rep. So I had no liking for the guy. I could have fun pulling the switch on the rats who deal in the stuff.

"Hear you were around when the shooting started at the Vanity the other night, Red. That's tough on Harmond. Might lose a bit of his business."

Bill thought the case was open and shut against Joan Gleason. With Robinson trying to cover her up, and her disappearing, it did look bad for the girl. Still, I wasn't convinced. I had a vague feeling there was more to it than appeared on the surface. I figured that if I could get Jake talking, something might slip.

"Harmond's business loss is sure to be your gain," I told Adare. "Only it would have been sweeter if those two lads had shot straighter."

Jake's head pivoted. "The crack's over my head. What's it add up to?"

"Simply that it's the general idea those two boys were friends of yours . . . and they were there to get Harmond!"

It was a shot in the dark; but it worked. Jake stiffened and his huge shoulders bunched. Then he relaxed, turned on what was supposed to be a smile.

"Joan Gleason was trying to shoot the Harmond woman out of circulation, Red. Anybody who has other ideas is looking for trouble. I've even known cab drivers to go for a swim . . . hack and all!"

The fellow's tone sent ice through

my blood. He was a bad actor, and usually meant what he said. I gulped my drink and beat it.

The rain was in a hurry. I slumped in my seat behind the wheel and watched the drops do a mad dance on the hood. It was late, and Fifty-second was a deserted alley of unglamorous wetness. I had the radio turned to the police calls. One came across suddenly that had me snapping out of my lethargy. I jammed in the gear and got rolling.

Police sirens and screaming brakes were making a bedlam of Fifty-sixth Street. I saw Bill bounce out of a prowl car and push through the crowd. I followed in his wake.

THE woman lying on the wet pavement was a mess. Her arms and legs were twisted grotesquely, giving the impression that there weren't many whole bones left in her body. She must have died very suddenly, which was a good thing, in a way. Someone threw a flash beam on her face, and I felt a lot of strength run out through the soles of my feet. I hadn't expected Rose Harmond to come to this kind of an end.

A cop was telling Bill, "The building is eight stories high. If she jumped from the top—"

But I wasn't listening. I had spotted something beside the body. I dropped a pack of butts on purpose, swooped up the piece of glass and pushed it into my pocket. Bill seemed to see me for the first time. He said:

"Come on, Red."

I followed him into the lobby. It must have been one of my dumb nights. It wasn't till we were walking down the fifth-floor corridor that it suddenly struck me that this was the Sheldon Apartments!

Joe Robinson was in pajamas. He stood in the doorway blinking sleep from his eyes. I thought, "If it's an act, it's a corker."

Joe spotted the gun in Bill's hand, said, "Oh, my goodness!" and led the way to the living room.

"Rose Harmond was here!" Bill snapped.

Robinson nodded, and I thought some of the color went out of his cheeks.

"Tell me about it," said Bill.

Robinson eased into a chair. "I don't get this, Regan. Looks like you intend to hound me. Rose was here, sure. Came to tell me she was sorry for the mess she had made of things. She said if and when Joan showed up, she wouldn't interfere again. We had a drink on it and she left."

"And you went straight to bed and corked right off. Didn't hear a thing?"

I had been roaming around. The bedroom was in the back, facing a court. With the door closed, Robinson could have missed the racket in the street. I started to tell Bill, but he had the floor all to himself. He was saying:

"Here's what really happened, Robinson. Rose came up here and you two got into an argument. You clipped her one and she went out. In a blind rage, you picked up her unconscious body and heaved it out the window!"

THAT was that. Joe Robinson was arrested, charged with murder. Later, I drove Bill uptown to give John Harmond the bad news. Dawn was just about breaking; but Harmond was up, dressed and shaved. He invited us into what was a richly furnished living room. There was some packed luggage in a corner, and Bill's eyes glued on it.

"Going away, Harmond?"

When the other nodded, Bill added, "The wife, too?"

"No!" said Harmond shortly.

"Seems odd. Or is it?"

"Nothing odd but your presence," Harmond snapped. "What's on your mind, Regan?"

I started to take a stroll for myself. Once I drifted into the bedroom, but was back in quick order. What I'd seen there would have interested Bill, but I kept quiet. The big hound had prevented me from taking the cops' exams, knowing that all my life I had just been waiting for my twenty-first birthday. So now I was holding out on him, and enjoying it. Bill shot a fast one.

"Your wife was murdered last night!"

I thought the man was going down. He grabbed a chair back and steadied himself. His face went chalklike. It looked like the real thing, but I didn't believe it. I had an idea Harmond knew things.

"Robinson and your wife were playing around," Bill told him. "It ended by Joe throwing her out his apartment window."

Harmond was shaking his head. "It couldn't be, Regan. Not Robinson. If she was murdered, Jake Adare did it! I got a call last night. A strange voice, but it wasn't hard to figure the source. Adare's been trying to put me out of business. The voice said that if I didn't get out of town, something would happen to my wife. I told the fellow to go to hell, but changed my mind later. That's why my bags are packed. I was leaving this morning, but they couldn't wait that long."

"I tell you," said Bill, "she was thrown out a window!"

"You're not sure of that," Harmond bit off. "It could have been some other way. Why not get the autopsy report?"

I stared at John Harmond. His statement had made one think of something. It reminded me that I had something to be checked at the police crime lab. I could tell them that Bill wanted the information. The piece of glass which I had found beside the body of Harmond's wife was still in my pocket.

"I pulled in the hack, but I didn't go home. I stopped into a barber shop, got cleaned up, then took a subway ride to the customhouse in Bowling Green. I had a hunch narcotics were tied up with this business somewhere, and I wanted to double-check. Dave Hallen, supervising customs agent, had ridden in my cab a few times, and I intended asking him a few things.

HALLEN answered my questions with a smile on his lips. I got the impression he thought my playing at detective was funny. But I did learn that a big load of narcotics recently had arrived on one of the French liners. The customs men had missed it, because it had gone over the side into a "junk" boat.

A junky character known as Cockeyed Sam was suspected of having taken the stuff into his boat. Hallen figured Sam was working for some big operator. I mentioned Adare, but Hallen shook his head. Adare had been under close surveillance, and the agent was sure he hadn't received this particular shipment.

In the police crime laboratory, I learned that the piece of glass I had found near the body of the Harmond woman, came from the headlamp of a Marvel car. That seemed to cinch things. Harmond had been right when he said his wife could have died some other way. It appeared she had been struck by a Marvel car traveling at a high rate of speed. And a big, flashy Marvel was one of the prized possessions of Jake Adare!

I was feeling good, and could visualize the expression on Bill's fat pan when I gave him all the smart answers. Just to be sure, I ran up to the garage where Adare kept his car to get a look at that headlight.

As an excuse for nosing around, I dropped into the garage office, pretending to use the wall phone. A memo pad on the desk caught my eye. It was used by the customers for leaving notes as to where they could be located by persons looking for them.

Directly on top was one of the night before. It was signed, "Jake," and stated that anybody who wanted him might have him paged in the lobby of the Hotel Lenox. What I couldn't understand was how Jake Adare could be in the lobby of the Lenox, when he was supposed to be out knocking down women with his car!

I got the answer to that one by talking to some of the hackies who played the Lenox line. They remembered the Marvel car because some dope had parked it on their stand.* They remembered a few out of the Lenox. I wanted to see other things that had me tearing Bill right away. The thing was so smart and there were so many angles, it was getting away from me. I raced to the corner and leaped into a

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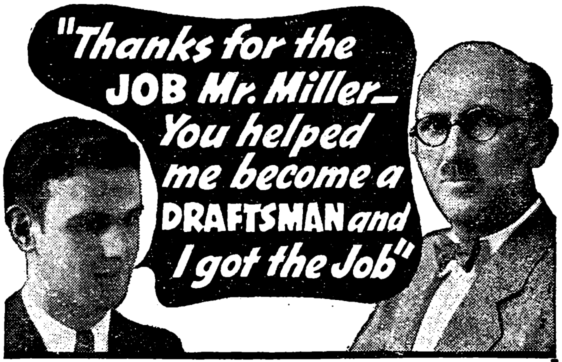
**Stand*—Designated part of street where drivers may park while awaiting fares.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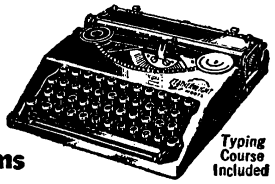

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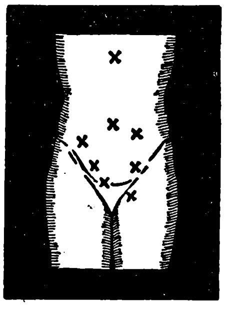

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parked cab. The two guys who were waiting inside jammed guns into my ribs.

I looked from one to the other and felt my tongue slap against the roof of my mouth. They were the same two who had started the shooting in the Vanity. The cab jumped ahead, made a left turn, and started across town toward the river. I yelled:

"Let me out of here! You can't pull this and get away with it. It's kidnaping—"

A left hook loosened my front teeth. The fellow who had hit me said. "Take it easy, kid. Adare's had us watching you. You were snoopin' around too much, so we picked you up. He may let you go when things blow over, if you don't get yourself knocked off beforehand."

CHAPTER III.

COPS IN THE FAMILY.

It was a tumble-down shack, nestled in between two warehouses. We climbed stairs to the top floor, went down a dark hall to the rear of the house. One of the men used a key and pushed me into a dark room. He struck a match and put it to an old-fashioned kerosene lamp that stood on a table. Then he went over and loosened the ropes that had been wrapped around the girl on the couch. She had been crying plenty. The girl was Joan Gleason.

I sat down beside her and patted her hand. The guy called Pete got a bottle from a closet and dished it out in water glasses. They had a few each, and Pete got nasty. I had been whispering to Joan, and Pete said:

"Break it up, punk!"

I guess the "punk" business got me. I made a dive for the guy and clipped him a right and left before he could get out of his chair. His pal moved fast, but his aim was bad.

The bottle came down on my shoulder instead of my head.

It ruined my right, but my left was still working. I smacked him two hard crosses that sent him crashing over the table. Joan screamed. She had good reason. That kerosene lamp had gone to pieces on the floor, and hungry flame ate up the spilled oil!

The house was old and dry. The floor caught like kindling wood. In less than a minute the room was a raging inferno. Pete had recovered his gun and his senses. He pegged two fast shots at me, but they were a mile wide. After that, he gave his attention to the fire.

Joan was screaming her head off over in one corner, with her fingers pressed hard against her white face. It was getting damned hot. I covered my eyes with my arm and started toward the girl. I never made it. A floor board gave way and I tripped and went out on my face.

My head banged against the floor and a lot of blackness began closing in. I fought off unconsciousness and struggled to get my foot out of that hole. I heard a door bang above the girl's screams. Flames were licking my face. My eyebrows were gone and a good part of my red hair. I caught myself trying to outyell the hysterical Joan, and clamped my jaws together. I went to work on the flooring that held my leg, and almost fainted from the smell of my own burning flesh. But I got free.

JOAN was still on the couch. I guess she would have just sat there and burned to death. I swooped her up and leaped through flame toward the door. I grabbed hold of the knob and went suddenly cold in the burning room. The door was locked from the outside.

I stood there and wasted precious moments cursing those two killers into Hades and out again. I threw the girl up on my shoulder and went back through all that fire to the front of the room. A door leading into the front of the house was also locked. I suddenly wanted to quit, give up. It was too tough, all this struggle. It would have been a cinch to close my eyes and pass out. My mind toyed with the idea.

I was badly seared and the thick smoke was beginning to get me. Joan was whimpering softly on my shoulder. My knees began to give and I grabbed the knob to brace myself. My fingers touched something below it. The key had been sticking there all the time. I turned it, went into the front room, then out into the hall.

Joan Gleason got a few gulps of fresh air and showed signs of life. I put her down near the stairs and she stood up fine. Just before starting down, I noticed a door in the rear of the house wide open. I went back and looked out into the night. I was standing on the third floor. There undoubtedly had been a stairway here at one time, leading to the yard below. But it had been removed.

I looked down and saw two shadows balled on the pavement below.

It wasn't hard to figure what had happened. Those two gorillas had thought this was a quick exit, and in their excitement, had stepped off into nothing. I started to say, "Too bad—" but checked myself.

I went back got Joan, and cleared out. We found a drugstore and, in a few minutes, Joan looked like something out of the "Follies." But not me. The fellow worked hard, but he couldn't put hair back on my head. He did suggest painting on brows though, and I almost clipped him for the sissy crack.

I called headquarters and learned that Bill was on his way up to the Oasis to see Adare. Next I phoned the customhouse and got Dave Hallen's home number. What he told me about Cockeyed Sam had me doing some fast thinking. I got a bright idea, and Hallen agreed to play along.

In the street, I hailed a cab and another chiseler appeared out of nowhere. The drivers almost crashed trying to grab the call. I put Joan Gleason in the first one, told her to go to her hotel and stay there. I waved a buck under the nose of the other cowboy:*

"Yours if you make the Oasis in nothing flat," I snapped. "Otherwise, you don't even get a tip."

THE guy was money-hungry. All he needed was wings on that load of his. He was completely colorblind as far as traffic lights were concerned. He dumped me out in front of the Oasis just as Bill and Al Wing piled out of a big police car. Bill blinked when he saw the condition I was in.

"You look like hell," he told me.

"I've just been through it, Bill. But it did some good. The Gleason girl is safe and sound in her hotel."

"Good for you, Red!" Wing exploded, and Bill stopped him with a bad look.

"How'd you fall into that, kid?" Bill cracked, and you couldn't miss the envy in his tone.

"It was so simple, I don't know how a smart cop like you missed it," I came back. "The two guys who shot up the Vanity were holding her prisoner for Adare." It hadn't been exactly that easy, but it got a rise out of my fat-headed brother, which was what I wanted.

"Adare!" Bill burst out. "We were up to question the guy. This puts him in a spot for fair."

It was early, and the club was deserted, except for a lad polishing glasses behind the bar. He paid no attention as Bill headed for Adare's private office, with Wing and I following after. Bill got out his Police Special and started down a short corridor. A few steps and he stopped, holding up his hand in warning. Voices were coming from behind a closed door on the left. Adare's was loud and angry.

"Nobody crosses me, Harmond, and gets away with it. I was willing to buy that junk you got off the French boat, and forget the Vanity. But that's all over. Now I take the stuff for nothing and you clear out of town. Or would you like the boys to ride you around?"

"You talk like a kid." Harmond's tone was cool, modulated. "The ride stuff is ancient history. Just bringing me here against my will is a kidnaping rap—"

A loud smack pushed the remainder of Harmond's words down his throat. Bill kicked in the door and waved his gun around. Adare had an automatic in his fist, with its nose dead center on Harmond's middle. A couple of Adare's coke-sniffers stood over against the wall holding rods that looked too heavy for their frail wrists. Wing made a face and their gun arms dropped. He had some mug, at that.

"Glad you dropped in, Regan," Harmond smiled. "It was getting a bit warm in here."

"Well!" said Bill, with his eyes and gun on Adare.

Jake growled and heaved his automatic onto the desk-top. He said:

"If this is grandstand play, Regan, it won't win you a thing more than pounding the pavement in the sticks. You got no right busting into my private office!"

---

*Cowboy—A reckless cab driver.

BILL walked over and threw his left into Adare's bloated face. Adare fell back, one hand jumping to his cut lips. The lips twitched and jerked down at the corners. Icy words dropped out of his mouth.

"There's never been a reason good enough to make me take that, flatfoot. But maybe you got a new one."

"How about murder?" Bill snapped.

I went over and planted myself in a chair near the phone. I was expecting a call, and I didn't want anyone else to get it. I was gambling plenty on the expected phone call. Adare was sneering.

"You're talking dumb, Regan. You can't pin a murder rap on me."

"You murdered Harmond's wife!" Bill said, and had me sitting up straight. It sounded like the guy knew a few things at that.

"You're out of your mind!" Adare roared. "Robinson threw her out a window—"

"The autopsy proved she was hit by a car traveling fast. We checked your flashy car, Jake, just in case. We learned it was out that night, and the ultraviolet light brought out bloodstains on the front bumper. Besides, they told me at the lab that Red was in with a piece of headlight glass that came from a Marvel.

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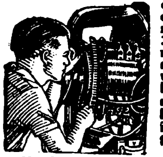

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I saw him pick it up near the body of Rose Harmond. You heard enough, Jake?"

If Jake hadn't, I had. I was staring at Bill with what must have been admiration in my eyes. He wasn't so dumb after all. Imagine him seeing me pick up that hunk of glass, and keeping mum?

Adare's face was suddenly a mushy paste. Fear was in his pea-sized eyes, had his lip trembling.

"You're all wrong, Regan," Adare said. "Harmond can tell you. I didn't kill anybody. I had a date with Harmond in the lobby of the Lenox. He didn't show, but I waited most of the night. He was supposed to turn over some dope to me. He—"

Harmond was wagging his head, and trying to look sympathetic. "The man must be insane. I just learn that he has murdered my wife, and he wants me to back a phony alibi. Perhaps he's been hitting his own dope."

Adare's breathing was loud in the room. The phone bell sounded like a crash of thunder. I grabbed up the handset fast.

"Hello, Hallen," I said. "You grabbed Cockeyed Sam? Good for you! I kept nodding my head and muttering an affirmative here and there. Harmond was doing funny things with his mouth. Adare had moved back, was leaning against the desk. I cradled the phone and grinned up at them.

"Was that Dave Hallen?" Bill demanded.

I nodded. "Said the Fed boys just picked up Cockeyed Sam. They got him to talk. Sam claims he and Mr. Harmond were partners in a big load of narcotics that came off a French boat. Sam also told about stealing Adare's car from in front of the Lenox—"

"You lousy, dirty double-crosser!" Adare spat at Harmond, and dived for the gun on the desk.

HARMOND fired without removing the gun from his pocket. Hair jumped up on Adare's head as the bullet tore in. He went out on his face on the desk and lay still.

The "cokey" twins over against the wall threw a lot of wild lead at Harmond. The club owner took the gun from his pocket and fired from his hip. One of the twins suddenly had three eyes.

The other turned to see, and took the next slug behind his ear.

Wing fired, missed, and had his right leg shot from under him. Instead of shooting the crazy killer, Bill jumped forward, tripped and went down on his face. Harmond grinned and aimed at the back of his head.

I froze where I stood. I tried to yell, but no sound came. My own brother was about to be murdered before my eyes. It seemed like a horrible dream, wherein I was powerless to move. A million thoughts rushed through my mind in that flashing second.

I recalled years back, when Bill first learned to swim down at the free baths. He came running along the dock, yelling, "I can swim, Red! I can swim!" And some big guy standing there had said, "Oh, yeah!" and pushed him off the pier.

I'll never forget how I hung over that dock, crying, praying for Bill to come up. It seemed ages. But he finally hit the surface and dog-paddled to safety.

Well, I had the same horrible feeling now, and was just as helpless to do anything about it. Harmond was pulling the trigger in slow motion. Bill was rolling over in the same manner. I was waiting for the sound of the shot that meant death for Bill. My fingers dug into the handset, and suddenly I realized I had been gripping it all the time.

I yanked with all my might. It came away and I heaved almost as the shot sounded. I was a fraction of a second ahead of Harmond. The heavy instrument struck his shoulders, half-turned him. Bill shot from the floor and didn't stop until the six bullets were in Harmond's crumpling body.

I WAS propped up in a chair and Mom was dancing in atttendance about me. The burns didn't hurt so badly, but I guess I just liked being pampered. Besides, Bill was hanging on my every word; and that was the way I liked to have him.

"When we were up in Harmond's apartment," I told Bill, "I happened to breeze into the bedroom. In the closet I found a raincoat that was still wet. That meant Harmond had been out the night of the murder. Later, Dave Hallen told me Adare had not received that last load of dope, and I began to figure Harmond might be mixed in the snow business. At Adare's garage, I learned he had been out with his car the night of the murder. It threw the suspicion back on him, but to be certain, I checked at the Lenox."

"Yeah? Yeah?" Bill prompted, and I took my time on purpose.

"The cabbies who play the Lenox line remembered the Marvel. They had seen Jake Adare park it and go into the hotel. But later, a cockeyed guy came along and drove the car away. He returned in a half hour, jumped out of the Marvel and beat it. Adare came out and drove away, without knowing someone had used his car. Here's what happened:

"Harmond, working with Cockeyed Sam, had brought in that last load of narcotics and was competing with Jake. So Adare imported those two mugs from Detroit who tried to kill Harmond. Harmond decided to beat Adare to the punch. He also knew that his wife was making a play for Robinson, so he decided to kill two birds with one stone. He made a date with Jake, and had Sam steal the car while Adare waited in the lobby. Harmond used the car to murder his wife, then had Sam drive it back to the hotel. His idea was to have Adare accused of the murder."

Bill made laps up and down the floor, acting big before Mom. "The rest was simple," he shouted. "Joan Gleason knew who fired those shots in the Vanity, but was afraid to talk. That's why she remained mum when Robinson found the gun at her feet and accused her of trying to blast Rose Harmond. Adare figured she had seen things, and had his hoodlums grab her out of circulation."

Bill stopped, jammed his fists against his hips, and grinned down at me.

"You were lucky, kid. If Hallen hadn't picked up Cockeyed Sam and got him to spill things, you wouldn't have gotten to first base."

A lot of profanity crowded up in my throat, but I swallowed it and grinned back. "Yeah! Only the cockeyed boy didn't talk. You see, the Feds had to kill Sam in order to take him. So I had Hallen call me at the Vanity. I pretended Sam had talked, filling in with my own ideas. You noticed the effect on Harmond?"

Mom rushed over and threw her arms around me. "My dear, Francis! How clever you are! The police commissioner is sure to promote you for this!"

I thought Bill's eyes would pop out of his fat face. "But, Mom!" he roared. "*I'm* the cop round here! Red's only a hacky!"

Mom crimsoned to the ears. "Of course, William. What a silly mistake—"

And there I was, laughing off my red head.

From the Editor

Continued from page 6

to us. His story in this issue is "Clue in Pink." He lives in Connecticut most of the time, although he occasionally hungers for the city and will move into New York for a month or two, just to break the monotony of a country existence. When in New York, he selects a quiet residential hotel not too far away from the main public library, so that he can spend a great deal of time looking up background, references, and other such work.

In between times, he enjoys hunting and fishing trips. His hunting he does in upper New York State, or in Canada. He likes to go as far as a railroad will take him, and then go quite a bit farther before he actually starts to hunt! As for fishing—it's deep-sea fishing for him. He is in a handy place for that, for there are countless deep-sea fishing boats sailing out of Long Island fishing ports every day. If he wants to go away for that sport, he sails to Nova Scotia, where his many trips have resulted in a host of friends in almost every fishing hamlet there. And he is always threatening to bring in a whale or something, despite the fact that we insist we do not like fish!

Government Checks

THE United States treasury department has recently sent to all merchants and storekeepers an emphatic warning concerning the cashing of all government checks. It seems that in the past many forgeries have been committed, innocent persons have been cheated out of their money, and merchants, to their regret, have found out that they have been obliged to make good the money when the error was due to them.

The government sends this warning: "DEMAND ABSOLUTE IDENTIFICATION OF THE PAYEE OF ANY GOVERNMENT CHECK PRESENTED FOR NEGOTIATION, to avoid losses resulting from forged indorsements. For example, all W. P. A. employees have identification cards bearing a number, and this number appears after the name of the payee on the check. Merchants should be certain that these numbers correspond and that the payee's indorsement on the back of the check is in the same handwriting as the signature on the W. P. A. identification card."

Moreover, it is suggested that further identification be required, so that there will be absolutely no doubt that the person cashing the check is the person to whom the check is made payable.

It can be seen how easily mistakes might be made. Naturally the government's checks would be honored anywhere. But these checks might get into the wrong hands. Take, for instance, a W. P. A. worker living in a rooming house. It would be quite possible for a transient guest to receive the W. P. A. worker's mail, find a government check, in-

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dorse it and get it cashed before the fraud was discovered.

Of course, we know that the post office department has coöperated in requiring that a person be at home when a check is delivered. The postman is supposed to hand the check to the addressee in person. But even here errors can happen.

Perhaps the mail carrier is a substitute, a new man on the route. How easy for someone to impersonate the real person who is supposed to receive the check! Or, where a W. P. A. worker lives alone in a rooming house, perhaps someone slips into his room during his absence and rifles his mail. These things can easily happen, and for this reason merchants and others should be on the alert to demand positive identification of persons presenting these government checks.

Here is another warning the treasury department sends out:

> IMPORTANT—Social Security account number cards *should not be accepted by merchants as identification* for the cashing of government checks presented by strangers.

The warning goes on to state that if any person introduces someone to you as the payee of a government check for the purpose of having you cash the check, be sure to have the person making the introduction place *his own* signature on the check, and determine that he is financially able to refund to you the amount involved in the event the check was not actually intended for the person receiving the money.

In case of any incident wherein you might suspect fraud in regard to this matter, or in case of actual theft of a check, get in touch with your nearest Secret Service division of the United States treasury department. There is usually an office in every large city.

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Over 300 more men will be given the opportunity *at once* to run fine-paying Coffee Agencies right in their own home localities. A remarkable chance to make up to $45.00 in a week starting immediately. No experience needed. This company will send you everything you need, give you all the help you require, and back you up with its proven successful plans. A chance to be independent, work as you please, and make more than just a modest living.

Limited Number of New Openings

If you want to know whether there is an opening for you in your own or nearby locality, mail the Application below. By return mail you will be notified whether we have an opening for you, and if we have, you will receive full information about this Coffee Agency Plan. You don't send a penny—just mail the Application. No obligation—you decide after you read the plan. Don't delay. Send your Application at once.

Operate Right From Your Own Home

Everybody uses Coffee, Tea, Spices, Flavoring Extracts, and many other daily household necessities. They *must* buy these things. All you need do is visit your regular customers in your locality, supply their needs and pocket your fine profits. M. C. Ebert, Pa., reported $68.20 clear profit in a week; G. J. Olsen, N. Y., $79.85 in a week; W. J. Way, Kansas, with us 9 years, $19.10 in one day; Mrs. H. H. Hosick, Nebr., $41.73 her very first week; Mrs. Ella Ehrlicher, Mo., with us over 6 years, $85 in one week. J. W. Willoughby, Okla., $48 his first week. These exceptional earnings show *your* possibilities. Brand new Ford Tudor Sedans, or $500.00 cash if preferred, are given producers as a bonus in addition to their own cash earnings.

Find Out If Your Locality Is Open

SEND NO MONEY

Just clip out and mail the Application. It merely tells us that you would consider running a permanent, highly profitable Coffee Agency in your locality if we have an opening for you. We will write to let you know if we have an opening, and will give you complete details about this exceptionally fine opportunity. Then you can decide for yourself whether the money-making possibilities look good to you. Don't delay—rush the Application at once.

ALBERT MILLS, President, 6627 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

COFFEE AGENCY APPLICATION

① **WRITE YOUR FULL NAME AND ADDRESS HERE:**

Name ....
(State whether Mr., Mrs., or Miss)

Address ....

City and State ....

② **HOW MUCH TIME CAN YOU DEVOTE TO COFFEE AGENCY?**

Mark with an "X" ☐ FULL TIME ☐ PART TIME

Full time pays up to $30 to $45 in a week. Part time, either during the day or evenings, pays up to $22.50 in a week.

③ **STATE WHICH BONUS YOU PREFER—CASH OR FORD AUTOMOBILE**

In addition to their cash earnings, we offer producers a cash bonus of $500.00 or brand-new, latest model Ford Tudor Sedans. State which you would prefer if you decide to accept our offer. Mark "X" before your choice.

☐ $500 CASH BONUS; ☐ LATEST MODEL FORD TUDOR SEDAN

④ **CAN YOU START AT ONCE?** Mark with an "X" ☐ YES ☐ NO

If you cannot start at once, state about when you will be able to start..........................

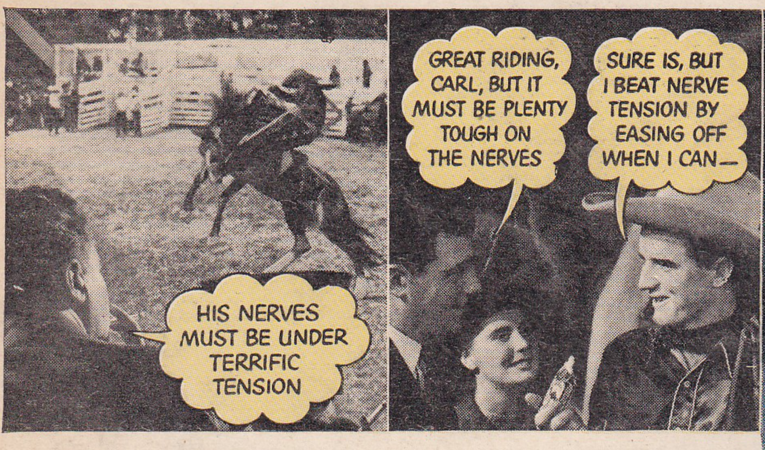
....

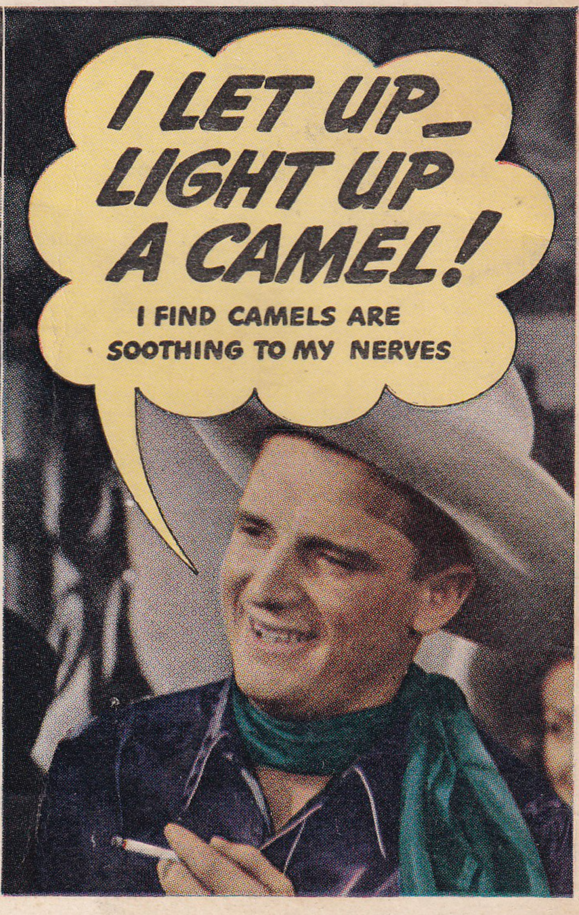
RUSH! Tear Out and Mail at Once to

ALBERT MILLS, President, 6627 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, O.

"You bet Stunt Riding is a strain on the Nerves!"

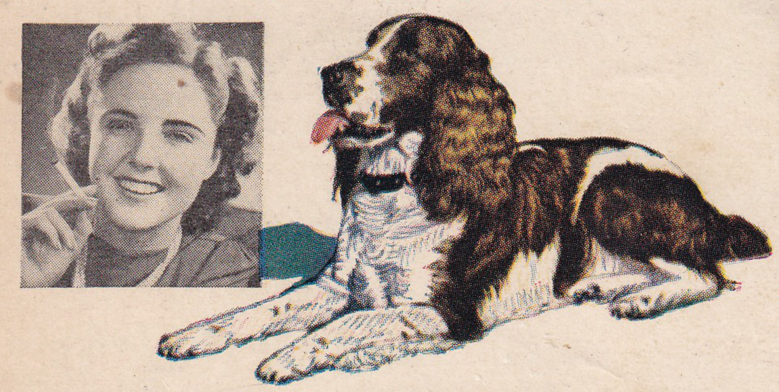
says Carl Dossey, CHAMPIONSHIP COWBOY AND RODEO STAR


HIS NERVES MUST BE UNDER TERRIFIC TENSION
GREAT RIDING, CARL, BUT IT MUST BE PLENTY TOUGH ON THE NERVES
SURE IS, BUT I BEAT NERVE TENSION BY EASING OFF WHEN I CAN—


I LET UP—LIGHT UP A CAMEL!
I FIND CAMELS ARE SOOTHING TO MY NERVES

"RIDE 'EM, COWBOY!" . . . and Arizona's Carl Dossey *does*—with the brilliant rodeo horsemanship that's won him two bareback championships in California, and a high-point cowboy title at the big Cedar City (Utah) show. He's pictured above in a breath-taking stunt at New York's Madison Square Garden. No room in *this* performance for tense, jittery nerves! Later, over a Camel, Carl explains his way of sidestepping nerve strain . . . a pleasant way you'll want to adopt.

MUCH CAN BE LEARNED ABOUT NERVES BY OBSERVING THE DOG



NO DOUBT about the nerve strain in Dossey's life. But often we don't realize how tense nerves can get in every-day occupations—perhaps in your own. Miss Ferril (*below*) avoids nerve strain as so many smokers do . . . by letting up—lighting up a Camel!

THE English Springer Spaniel (*above*) is speedy, agile—an especially good gun dog. He has a highly developed nervous system remarkably similar to our own . . . sensitive, high-keyed. But, unlike many humans, this dog doesn't ABUSE his nerves. When a dog feels tired, he rests INSTINCTIVELY! We often let will-power whip us on, deaf to the warning that nerves are getting frayed. Yet how much more pleasant life can be when nerves are rested now and then. Pause frequently . . . LET UP—LIGHT UP A CAMEL! You'll welcome Camel's mildness—rich, ripe flavor. Smokers find Camel's COSTLIER tobaccos are soothing to the nerves.

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CHOICE QUALITY

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Smokers find Camel's Costlier Tobaccos are SOOTHING TO THE NERVES

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